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University of Alberta

Graceful Penetration: Judith Thompson and her Audience

by

Joanna Grace Falck 

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

Department of Drama

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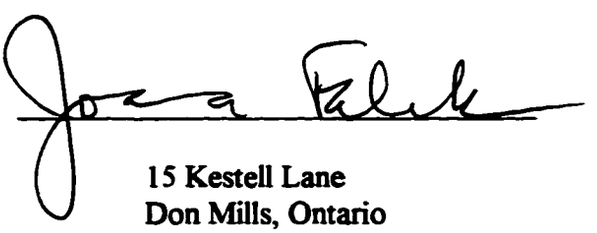

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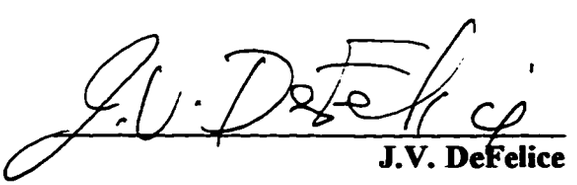

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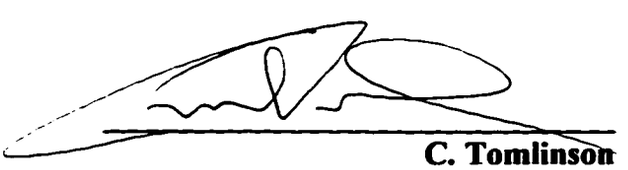

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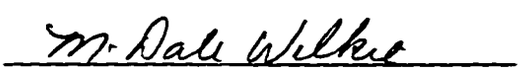

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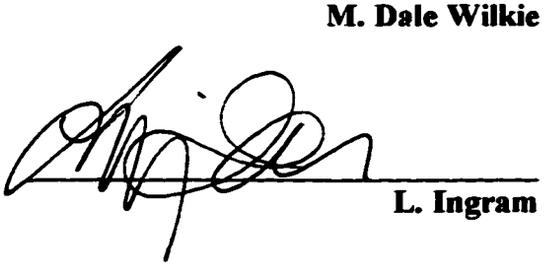

L. Ingram

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Abstract

This thesis discusses the plays of Judith Thompson, focusing specifically on the 'penetrative effect' her plays have on the audience. How does Thompson affect and move her audiences and, more importantly, why? To many observers of her work, her plays have a dark and disturbing quality--they are full of strange characters, brutal violence and bizarre imagery. This thesis attempts to trace how these elements of her work are used in order to deeply affect her audiences.

Three of Thompson's works are discussed: White Biting Dog (1984), I Am Yours (1987) and Lion in the Streets (1991). Each chapter examines the written text and how imagery, language and themes work to create what Thompson hopes will be a cathartic theatrical experience. The thesis traces not only how Thompson wishes to move her audience inside the theatre but asks how her plays should lead people to action in their own lives.

Acknowledgements

To my Committee: Thank you to Jim DeFelice, my supervisor who kindly agreed to take me on--thanks for your support, kindness, wisdom and patience through every step of my journey through this thesis. Thanks also to Dale Wilkie and Charlie Tomlinson for being as passionate about this playwright's work as I am. Special thanks to Liz Ingram saving me when all hope seemed lost. Thanks also to Debby Thompson, my initial supervisor.

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Thank you ALL!

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Introduction

Judith Thompson is one of Canada's premier playwrights. For over 15 years her stage plays, radio plays and monologues have moved and disturbed audiences across Canada and around the world. Her four major plays include The Crackwalker (1980), White Biting Dog (1984), I Am Yours (1987) and Lion in the Streets (1991) and in January 1997, the Tarragon Theatre in Toronto produced her newest play, Sled. Twice her work has been awarded the Governor General's Award for Drama: in 1984 for White Biting Dog and in 1989 for a collection of her works called The Other Side of the Dark. Critics and reviewers have described her work as a "visceral experience which assaults the audience" [1] full of "remorseless realism and foul language".[2] Words such as unsettling, dark and disturbing are frequently repeated in descriptions of Thompson's drama. However, on the other side of this darkness there is something else at work in her plays. When Thompson discusses her own work she uses the words catharsis, confronting our spirits, truth and grace. In interviews Thompson is often asked about the effect her plays have on her audiences. Does she understand why people sometimes walk out of her plays,

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[1] Toles, George. "'Cause You're the Only One I Want'". Canadian Literature 118 (Autumn 1989), p.132.

[2] Zimmerman, Cynthia. "Judith Thompson" in Playwrighting Women. (Toronto: Simon and Pierre Publishing, 1994), p. 177.

offended by what they have seen? When asked about the "'penetrative' effect"[3], as one interviewer called it, of her plays, Thompson's response is:

> A lot of people think that my work is out to shock people. But I really am honestly shocked when people are shocked. It would be as if I said to you, 'I heard an awful story about a lady down the street who has cancer,' you know, just a sad story, and you said to me, 'Oh Judith! Why did you want to shock me like that?!' You wouldn't say that, would you. You'd just feel for this lady. [4]

For me, the power of Thompson's work comes from the effect her plays have on the audience. Having spoken to many people who have seen or read her work, I have noticed that the reaction to her plays is usually a strong one--people seem to either love or hate them. I am always excited by playwrights who cause such reactions because I wonder why I can love these plays that so many other people find offensive or disgusting. In writing this thesis my hope is to try to understand why and how her plays work on her audiences thereby explaining my own reaction to them. I enjoy reading or watching Judith Thompson's work but at the same time it can be a frightening experience. I'm afraid of what I think about while I read them and I do not want to feel what I do because I'm sure that this can't be me, I don't really think and feel these things, do I? And if I do, how does she know about these hidden thoughts of mine? I feel invaded, overtaken, overwhelmed and like a car wreck at the side of the road, I know I should not want to

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[3] Tomc, Sandra. "Revisions of Probability". Canadian Theatre Review 59 (Summer 1989), p.19.

[4] Tomc, p.22.

look at her plays but I do, I have to--something about her work satisfies something within me or else I would not continue to return to them. Obviously her plays are full of striking images and strong characters but there must be something else which audiences (in which I include myself) are reacting to in her plays. In one interview Thompson discussed achieving what she called 'grace', which has become a central concept in any discussion of Thompson's work, and its effect on the audience. Is this the good that will come out of watching all of her "horrible Truth"[5] as she herself calls what she presents or reveals in her plays? Thompson only says: "Grace is something you have to work and work at. It happens through penitence, through sight. Through seeing who you are and changing things. You achieve it through humility". [6] Through my examination of Thompson's work I want to find where this achievement of grace can come from. Does it, can it truly come from watching her plays? I know I cannot explain how each person in the audience feels when watching one of her plays or what they do once they leave the theatre but by reading and outlining here some of what Thompson says she wants the ideal experience to be, I can then look at the plays and trace how this experience is created. This means looking at the plays in terms of themes, structure and language to see how Thompson uses them to create what was referred to earlier as this penetrative effect and to discover if this penetration can possibly lead to grace.

Specifically, I will examine three of her plays: White Biting Dog, I Am Yours and

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[5] Rudakoff, Judith. "Judith Thompson Interview" in Fair Play. Ed. Judith Rudakoff and Rita Much. (Toronto, Simon and Pierre Publishing), p.102.

[6] Rudakoff, p.103.

Lion in the Streets to analyze how these plays are working on stage and on the audience. I have chosen these three plays because for me their structure and the journeys of the characters (and therefore the audience) are the most similar. I will look at each of the plays separately since the world of each play operates differently for both the characters and the audience. I will discuss the plays in chronological order--White Biting Dog, 1984, I Am Yours 1987, Lion in the Streets 1991--because with each play her scope becomes wider and the ability for the audience to discern what is 'really' happening and what is not becomes more difficult. White Biting Dog is set in one space which becomes a world unto itself. Within this world the audience is able to accept everything, no matter how 'unreal' it may seem. In Lion in the Streets an entire neighbourhood is explored and the worlds of reality, fantasy or dream are simple shifts which are not pointed to or explained. I Am Yours seems to exist between the two because while the dream world or 'unreality' of White Biting Dog is certainly present in the play, any shifts made are not as sudden or unexplained as they are in Lion in the Streets. I want to understand how the bringing together of reality and unreality affects the audience's perceptions or understanding of the play. If Thompson wants an audience member to see truth, confront our spirits, have a catharsis and continue to work outside of the theatre how is this journey created in the world of the play? 'Grace' may be achieved by certain characters in her plays but does this or can this happen to audience members?

Whenever Thompson is asked if she understands the strong and sometimes negative reactions to her plays, she explains: "I guess I'm very naive when I write. It just doesn't occur to me that these characters would offend anybody because they're people

and I care about them. And you just don't care about people because they're nice or they're pretty...".[7] She describes how her characters are created and that when she writes, she becomes her characters; she inhabits them for a while to get a clear understanding of them.[8] This is likely connected to the fact that she had trained as an actor before she became well known as a playwright. Her first play, The Crackwalker, started as a character she created in a mask class at the National Theatre School.[9] She eventually wrote down some of her monologues and out of them created her first play. Because of this method of creation she has lived all of her characters; she has been inside their skins, knows what they know, has thought their sometimes horrible thoughts; she has **been** them so she cannot and does not judge them. Thus the penetrative effect of these characters begins with Thompson. They seep into her or she into them and then, she hopes, these characters will seep into her audiences.

What does Thompson hope an audience will gain after being invaded by one of her plays? Again in her own words, Thompson feels that many people are walking around in what she calls "our comas"[10]: we feel little, we are numbed from the horrors we witness every day around us from the homeless person on the street to terrorist bombings we see on the news. We are cut off from each other so we no longer feel empathy for our fellow

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[7] Rudakoff, p. 91.

[8] Weins, Mary. "Playwright Judith Thompson". Performing Arts. Vol. XXII, no. 4, (January 1986), p.23.

[9] Zimmerman, Playwriting Women, p.178.

[10] Zimmerman, Cynthia. "A Conversation with Judith Thompson". Canadian Drama. Vol 16, no.2 (1990), p.193.

human beings. By experiencing one of her plays, allowing ourselves to be penetrated by one of her characters or images, Thompson hopes that her audiences will begin again to feel something for the people around us, to wake up out of this coma and open our eyes to an examination of the world we live in. She feels this kind of examination is the political aspect of her work:

> My real hope is to hold a mirror up to all of us, because I think that awakening, slipping out of our comas, is what it's all about. Otherwise, we do not live--its the unexamined life. The coma lifting, then, becomes political. Art is political, should be political, but only in this really essential way. [11]

One strong theme in her plays is the examination of what is often described as the 'underbelly' of society: lower class people who use foul language, people with whom most theatre audiences would feel little connection. For Thompson, however, to deny one's connection to this part of society would be to say that you are not human. In describing the characters in The Crackwalker she says we all have "a little Therese in us: the innocent [...] there are lots of Joes everywhere[...]how is Sandy different from most of the women in the audience?"[12] Thompson wants to remind us that we are **all** connected. Issues of class are a major theme in Thompson's plays because this is one way we try to separate ourselves from one another. Thompson examines class and other issues of power such as gender and power structures within families to explore why we feel the need to dominate others:

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[11] Zimmerman, Canadian Drama, p.193.

[12] Rudakoff, p.100-7.

> I suppose the family is obviously a microcosm of how you relate to the whole world. People who have been able to manipulate their parents manipulate the world and people for whom their parents were the ultimate authority tend to bow to other kinds of authority. The family is where I can really get in and study and investigate who people are. [13]

Power is examined in many different forms; family love and the wish to make connections with others is both desired and feared by the characters. They distance themselves from one another because they fear losing power or control over themselves. Thus her plays are brutal, they are bold and difficult. They have to be in order to break through the barriers we have all created around ourselves, separating us from one another.

Thompson wants the audience not only to place themselves within a larger society to connect themselves with the people surrounding them, but to look inward as well. Thompson recognizes and stresses the need for self-examination. "Once you're in your late twenties and thirties," she warns, "if you don't do serious work on who you are, if you don't acknowledge and meet fatality, then there is such damage that can be done[...]You have to think and work on yourself".[14] Her hope seems to be that if people are not already examining themselves that the theatre will help lead them to this path. Therefore her plays must be powerful. They need to affect her audiences spiritually, physically, psychologically and, most importantly, they must be TRUE. This truth comes out in many forms; Thompson sees truth through many different means of expression. Thompson

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[13] Tomc, p.20.

[14] Rudakoff, p.89-90.

defines this truth as pure experience lying beneath the surfaces we have worked so hard to create. Truth is in those thoughts we cannot comprehend, in the feelings we try to hide because they are not good or right, in the horrible pictures that race through our minds that we cannot stop. Whatever we uncover during searches within ourselves may not always be pretty or pleasant, just as the images and characters we see on Thompson's stage are sometimes difficult to watch, but looking within oneself is the difficult work which Thompson is not afraid to confront. If people see this truth on stage, she hopes this will prevent what she calls "those black holes of people who are fifty-five walking around and not a word they say is sincere".[15]

For me, it is the uncovering of these deep, secret thoughts and fantasies that attracts and perhaps repels many people from her work. I always come away from reading or seeing one of her plays wondering how did she know that about me? How did she know people thought like that? This is, for me, what makes people literally squirm in their seats while watching her plays. It is not just that what we are seeing is ugly but that we recognize this ugliness as part of ourselves. Again, this is the truth as Thompson calls it that many people do not wish to confront. We may be able to hide it on a day to day basis but when Thompson puts it on stage in front of us to examine we are jolted into recognizing this unattractive side of ourselves. In psychology or philosophy this uncovered truth is referred to by different names--the id, the uncivilized man--Thompson most often represents this dark side by an animal within one of or even several characters. Dee in I Am Yours struggles throughout the play to keep her animal behind the wall but,

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[15] Rudakoff, p.94.

as she tells her sister, she cannot always control it: "Like a shark banging at the shark cage and sliding out. Out of the wall and inside me".[16] Pony in White Biting Dog says of her dog Queenie "I'm so close with her I almost am her"[17] and Isobel in Lion in the Streets tells Christine, "You are a slave of the lion!".[18] It is this side of ourselves that we must acknowledge that her characters are constantly confronting in her plays. Thompson feels we all have a part of ourselves that we do not always control, that then allows us to commit "little murders"[19] as Thompson calls them, when we, for example, gossip about our friends. This part of all of us which allows us to do these things which we know are wrong connects us to even the murderers that roam throughout almost all of her plays. Are we really as different from those killers as we would like to believe? What if we acted on just one of our own bad thoughts? Inside of all of us there are ideas, dreams, fantasies that we would not want anyone to see or know about. Thompson describes this internal struggle as a war going on inside each of us. She calls it a "St. George and the Dragon[...]Was this an evil thought? Was this a good thought?"[20] Thompson then puts a name to this war. A character's internal struggles are externalized by tangible, physical

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[16] Thompson, Judith. I Am Yours in The Other Side of the Dark. intro Urjo Kareda. (Toronto: Coach House Press, 1989), p.140. All further references to this work appear in the text.

[17] Thompson, Judith. White Biting Dog. (Toronto: Playwrights Canada Press, 1984), p.47. All further references to this work appear in the text.

[18] Thompson, Judith. Lion in the Streets. (Toronto: Coach House Press, 1992), p.50. All further references to this work appear in the text.

[19] Zimmerman, Canadian Drama, p.191.

[20] Zimmerman, Canadian Drama, p.185.

manifestations. Some characters refer to this struggle as an animal within them fighting to get out while other characters become infested internally and their struggles become about fighting off cancer or pregnant women grapple with the child growing inside of them. The barriers between the internal and external are broken down in her plays. The animals come out. The ugly thoughts are spoken aloud. Physically, the body expresses the struggle for the body is, of course, as involved in the war as the spirit or the mind. In her plays, the split between mind and body; the divisions between what we think inside of our heads, what happens physically inside of our bodies and what we present to the world is eliminated. Bodily fluids spill out just as the long monologues detailing characters' thoughts come spilling out on stage. The boundaries between public and private, between what the characters might normally keep hidden and what they say out loud are abandoned.

Through the breakdown in the characters of any internal/external split, the audience experiences a kind of catharsis. The audience encounters an enactment of the thoughts or feelings which we all may have had but would never imagine expressing aloud. Thompson defines this enactment in terms of a release:

> I think that's what theatre should do, is show us what is invisible and covered up with piles of everydayness and everyday life.[...]It's what we all want to do in some situations at some time and haven't been able to do because we have to hang on to our job or keep our reputation intact, or whatever. That's what I always love to do in the theatre, to give us a chance to do what we

want to do, through the characters. [21]

Again, it is going inside, going past what we present to the world in our daily lives which Thompson dramatizes. She also refers to this catharsis as a kind of religious experience she hopes her audiences will undergo. She wants her theatre to do for us what she feels church used to do. She herself was raised a Catholic and, although she no longer attends church, there is obviously a religious sensibility at work in her drama. When asked, as she often is, **why** she wants to write about the 'underworld' or the dark side of life, Thompson sounds almost like an evangelist:

> Well, because it's theatrical, it's what's true, and it's like the purpose the church used to serve: for an hour a week we would confront our spirits, what was really happening. In the theatre I think what one must do is confront the truth, confront the emotional truth of our lives, which is mired in the swamp of minutiae, everyday minutiae. Maybe it has to be that way, because we couldn't confront it everyday. But I think theatre must. I'm not interested in theatre that doesn't.[22]

Again, this is the TRUTH which Thompson seeks to uncover, which exists for all of us but we are unwilling or unable to recognize. She, as an artist, feels it is her duty to uncover these truths so the audience, if they wish to truly experience her plays, must also feel some of this pain which eventually leads to what Thompson calls grace. When asked to further define grace Thompson describes Pony's suicide at the end of White Biting Dog.

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[21] Wachtel, Eleanor. "An Interview with Judith Thompson". Brick 41 (Summer 1991), p.37.

[22] Wachtel, p.37.

Thompson explains that she achieves grace at the end of the play because she examines her life and recognizes the evil that has overtaken her and conquers this evil through her suicide.[23] Obviously Thompson is not advocating suicide as a means of achieving grace but this illustrates how hard the work to achieve grace is. This is how difficult the grappling with the animal, the war within can be. Presumably , by watching Pony achieve this grace at the end of the play we in the audience are meant to go out and try to achieve this same feeling in our own lives.

Thompson has said that an ideal theatrical experience would be for someone to experience the play as if it were a dream they were having: "They're your dreams, but it seems as if they're just happening to you." [24] Her plays feel as though they happen in this dream and sometimes nightmare world because it always feels as though anything could happen at any moment. Her plays are highly realistic but this realism is mixed with long poetic monologues (often compared to 'arias'), strange imagery or scenes which begin in realism and end in bizarre ways. Characters frequently transform on stage; some become themselves in childhood, others become possessed by other people or forces. These changes are not always commented on or explained. They just happen, just as it happens in dreams. This aspect of her plays also reminds one of fairy tales, which are also referred to in discussions of her plays. She says she was greatly influenced by them, particularly Grimm's fairy tales because, as she says "we're talking about tapping into a collective unconscious. They do, and I hope when my plays are working they do the same kind of

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[23] Rudakoff, p.103.

[24] Tomc, p.19.

thing".[25] Again, it's the unconscious level, the dream level of experience she wants to 'tap into' because in this dream world anything can happen. The world of dream happens for both the audience and her characters. This gives her characters the permission to do the unthinkable, the undoable, to talk about the things we do not talk about in day to day life.

For the audience member, the experience of watching one of Thompson's plays is not a passive one. If one is to experience the play as if one is watching a dream then, as in a dream, one becomes a participant in the action. But Thompson's plays are not 'participatory theatre' where audience members are invited on stage or asked to comment on the action. The role the audience is invited to play in Thompson's plays is active but silent. Julie Adam describes the complex role of the audience in Thompson's world of dream/play:

> [I]n a dream one is narrator, actor/character and observer, both insider and outsider, both active and passive, and it is this configuration that Thompson tries to replicate. Furthermore, she seems to wish to draw the audience into this dream-theatre and believes that they can relate on a subconscious level to the images that she places in characters' waking and sleeping dreams.[26]

With this thesis I will examine this obviously complex role the audience plays in Thompson's theatre. I will look at how she creates a world where the audience becomes involved on both a conscious and subconscious level in her plays. How does she create

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[25] Rudakoff, p.99.

[26] Adam, Julie. "The Implicated Audience". Women on the Canadian Stage. Ed. Rita Much. (Winnipeg: Blizzard Publishing, 1992), p.24.

the world of the dream/play or as Adam calls it, the "magical zone"[27] where the world of the play and the audience come together? How does the role of the audience, the level of their involvement in the world change from play to play? What kind of world does Thompson ask her audience to become a part of and why? These are some of the questions I will be taking with me as I take my journey through the world of Judith Thompson.

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[27] Adam, p.27.

Chapter One: White Biting Dog

Of all of Thompson's work, White Biting Dog is the play which has the ability to divide an audience most sharply. It seems to elicit strong feelings of either admiration or disgust, enlightenment or confusion. Despite, or perhaps because of, these strong reactions the play went on to win Thompson her first Governor General's Award for Drama in 1984. In 1989 she called it her "toughest play" and explained, "It's the least accessible. It's got more in it, it's more worth studying carefully than the others [which, at the time of this interview, did not include Lion in the Streets]. There's about five layers. [...] I worked hardest on White Biting Dog".[1] She also described it as the "most extreme"[2] of the plays she had written to that point. What does she mean by extreme? Like the Grimm's fairy tales which inspire her, events and characters in White Biting Dog operate on a level beyond literal comprehension and understanding. Cynthia Zimmerman writes, "just like a fairy tale, the associations White Biting Dog evoke for the reader or viewer very much depend on the viewer".[3] This play, more than any of her others, exists in the world of dream, fantasy or nightmare. Although, as Thompson insists, "anything in

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[1] Tomc, Sandra. "Revisions of Probability". Canadian Theatre Review 59 (Summer 1989), p.22.

[2] Tomc, p.22.

[3] Playwriting Women. (Toronto: Simon and Pierre Publishing, 1994), p.190.

it...of course could happen"[4] it is the most extreme in the way Thompson examines the inner workings of the characters. The separations between what characters keep inside or hidden away and what is said aloud or done in public are almost completely ignored. In this play Thompson most thoroughly explores both the danger and the need to look at what is inside. Those characters, such as Cape and Lomia, who have no inner life, who are those 'black holes' who do not let anything or anyone penetrate their outer layers, are confronted by their own inner emptiness while Pony and Glidden, learn about the difficulties that come with letting things in.

The play begins, as do her three other major plays, with a monologue to the audience. But even before Cape begins to speak, we hear him drumming on his bongo drums in a blackout: "He reaches a peak, stops, doubting the reason for drumming, starts again, then stops" (1). Music and songs, particularly the drumming, become a means of creating an atmosphere where another level of thought or feeling can be reached. Thompson feels that, "Music is a direct route to our soul"[5]. Pony, Cape and Glidden also sing throughout the play which adds to the rhythmical, musical quality which Thompson insists upon in her introduction to the play: "Because of the extreme and deliberate musicality of this play, any attempts to go against textual rhythms[...]are DISASTROUS. [...] This play must SPIN, not just turn around" (author's note). When Cape asks Pony to go into one of her trances she answers:

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[4] Tomc, p.22.

[5] Walker, Susan. "A Woman of Letters". The Toronto Star. Thursday, January 9, 1997, G3.

> Um, sure, I don't mind but--this feels so--kinda--normal, you know? I--like I wonder if we could have something for the--underneathness?
>
> CAPE: Oh yes! Sure. (turns out lights; moves to drums) How's that? (19)

For Thompson then, the drumming and darkness at the beginning of the play immediately stops everything from feeling so "normal" as Pony says. If we are to experience this play as a dream, Thompson opens the play with this darkness and drumming so that we, like Pony, can get into the 'underneathness'. This term, the 'underneathness', encapsulates for me the feeling which Thompson wants to reach with the play. She has said that her dense plays are not always understood upon the first viewing but she feels that they penetrate her audiences subliminally: "People will live with those images for a long time",[6] she hopes. The drumming in darkness at the beginning of the play establishes the exploration of the underneathness which continues throughout the play.

After the drumming stops, Cape begins to speak and he tells the audience a strange story of his almost suicide and a talking dog. If the atmosphere still felt too 'normal' after the drumming, Cape's opening monologue clearly establishes that this play takes place in a different world; a world where Cape can hear a dog speak to him and tell him how to change his life. Cape begins the monologue with uncertainty, "Did it even happen?" (1) he asks--perhaps himself or perhaps he is asking the audience. Like the opening monologues of Toi in I Am Yours (his search for home and mother) and Isobel in Lion in the Streets (she does not know she is a ghost), Cape seems as uncertain about what is happening as

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[6] Rudakoff, Judith. "Judith Thompson Interview" in Fair Play. Ed. Judith Rudakoff and Rita Much. (Toronto: Simon and Pierre Publishing, 1990), p.93.

the audience. He asks us questions and tries to convince us (and himself) that his story is real (this is also repeated in the opening monologues of Toi and Isobel). We do not know who this person is, how would we know whether 'it even happened' or not? But we are immediately implicated in the scene, our uncertainty is acknowledged by Cape but we cannot help him. Cape then continues to tell his story of arriving at the Bloor Street Bridge and he describes a dog that spoke to him. He then reconstructs his conversation with the dog in a "small strange voice":

> 'YOU'RE JUMPING TO HELL' the dog, the dog spoke.
>
> So I...answered--
>
> 'BUT I'M LIVING IN HELL...ANYWAY.'
>
> 'YOU'RE LIVING IN HELL, 'CAUSE YOU AIN'T DONE
> YOUR MISSION.'
>
> 'WHAT'S THAT?'
>
> 'TO SAVE YOUR FATHER FROM DEATH. TO SAVE YOUR
> FATHER FROM DEATH.'
>
> The dog...spoke! I'm not kidding! This dog
> actually spoke she saved me from the plunge;
> it was the weirdest-- (2)

Cape is sent on a 'mission' to save his father who is dying from a disease, as Thompson details in the long character descriptions, "contracted from the constant handling of sphagnum moss" (The Characters). This notion of salvation--both to save others and to save oneself--becomes a central theme in this play. The dog saves Cape from suicide but Cape must in turn save his already dying father. Cape's saviour, the dog, is a very different animal than the invading lion behind the wall in I Am Yours or the serial

killer image of Lion in the Streets; this dog can be seen as a projection of Cape's thoughts and fears--much like Dee's animal--but this animal is a more positive, helpful force than the lion Dee fears behind the wall. This is not the animal within us that wants to hide but rather the part of ourselves that has been covered up in those 'piles of everydayness'. This is the part within us that knows best what we ought to do but we suppress or deny it. In this world of underneathness, talking animals become not only acceptable but they speak wisely. Rather than invade or possess as the animals in her other plays the dog here saves a man from destroying himself. This is not a 'lion in the streets' but "QUEEN of dogs" (9) as Cape calls her.

For Cape the dog becomes a saviour, someone to call out to in times of need. When Glidden once again starts to pour peat moss over his head, Cape begins the drumming and calls out to the dog for help. Cape says he hears the "grinding of teeth again" (9) and thinks it is "the devils that my great aunt told us about, under the Don Valley Parkway" (9). To ward of these evil spirits he drums and calls out to the dog, calls out to be saved from the evil around him:

> --they're laughing because they think they have me
> but they don't--they don't, do they? 'Cause the
> white dog is coming, she's coming now oh somebody
> tell her tell her I'm in trouble, tell her to
> HEEEEEEEEEEELLLLLLLLLLP!!--the drums (starts
> drumming) white dog, dog from the bridge oh
> QUEEN of dogs oh please oh help oh help oh (stops)
> It's not working. What'll I do what'll I--A SONG! A
> song, yes, they sing in CHURCH (sings to the melody
> of Agnus Dei) A--ahhhh laaaaa whiiiiiitee dog
> pleeeeease... (9)

Cape uses music to summon the dog/saviour, but now he is reminded of church. In the introduction I quoted Thompson explaining that she feels church is where we would "confront our spirits".[7] Cape's hymn, this expressing a sense of a church, is another means of getting into the underneathness. At this moment, while Cape is singing his hymn, Pony enters singing her own love song to her dead dog Queenie, the tune of which Thompson has written for the actor at the beginning of the text:

> Your eyes do shine so bright and clear my dear
> my Queenie dear 'cause you're my dog my doggie
> dog I love ya soo I always will. . . . (10)

Upon seeing Pony, Cape thinks that she is what his music has conjured up and that she will become his protector, that she must be a human embodiment of the dog/saviour.

Through Cape, Thompson has dramatized the war she senses happening in the world. She feels that "there is evil and good warring in the culture at all times. And I do think it's in every human being".[8] He hears the devils under the bridge but also sees an angel in Pony. He wants to kill himself but a talking dog tells him not to. Cape thinks he has found a weapon to win this war, to fight off the devils under the DVP with an "angel" whom he believes will tell him "what the answer is" (10). Suddenly he realizes that perhaps Pony is "only a girl" (10) and is reminded of the curfew imposed because of "that guy that guy that strangled the cheerleader, he's still loose!" (10). The image of this murderer is another reminder of the war going on inside of us and around us; a reminder

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[7] Wachtel, Eleanor. "An Interview with Judith Thompson". Brick 41 (Summer 1991), p.37.

[8] Wachtel, p.39.

of the evil in the culture we must protect ourselves from and the evil inside each of us. The motif of a murderer loose on the streets appears in several other Thompson plays: in The Crackwalker Theresa fears that "Charlie Manson"[9] may be outside their apartment and Isobel in Lion in the Streets spends the play searching out her own murderer. In this play, the killer becomes a means of keeping everyone indoors, locked up in their houses having to deal with each other's thoughts, neuroses and diseases. Because White Biting Dog is Thompson's only play set in one space--Glidden and Cape's house--its atmosphere of entrapment or enclosure is very strong. Visually, the set also illustrates the theme of exploring what is beyond the surface. In the Author's notes Thompson explains that the "wall to Glidden's room must be transparent" (Author's Notes) so the audience can see through the walls into Glidden's private room. Skateboarding sounds remind the audience of the outside world looming around this little self-enclosed world.

Pony, however, is not afraid of this killer. She calls him a "weasel" (11) and Cape again thinks she must be more than just a girl if she too sings songs about a dog and wanders the street where murderers roam loose. And she is more than just a girl. She is someone who hears her urges and instincts and obeys them, much like animals, and her connection to the animal world is well established from the beginning of the play--her name being the most obvious signifier of this relationship. Pony tells of how she came to find Cape and describes it as, "this UNRESISTABLE urge to get up and go out for a walk. And when urges like that come along, I listen to them so I did. I just walked where

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[9] Thompson, Judith. The Crackwalker in The Other Side of the Dark. (Toronto: Coach House Press, 1989), p.53. All further references to this work appear in the text.

my feet took me" (11). Pony is someone who can hear those urges and listens to what her inner voices tell her to do. Through her heightened knowledge of self, Pony becomes the voice of order and beliefs in the play. She takes over the dog's role as saviour who eventually sacrifices herself to save Cape. Her previous job connects her to this role as helper; she was an ambulance driver but had to quit because there was no order: "Nobody gave a fig! So I said to myself, 'Pony, if you want order you're gonna have to be your own boss and that's all there is to it'" (14). She has started her own business so Cape assumes her new job is saving lives on her own. She tells Cape that she fixes "things though eh, not people" (14) but he senses she is here to 'fix' him. Thompson describes Pony as "deeply ethical" (The Characters) and Pony even admits to being psychic; if there are any questions or problems that need to be answered she can simply go into a trance "and then the answer comes out" (18). She tells Cape how she was able three times to save people in trouble (including her dog, Queenie) and this confirms for both she and Cape that she is there to save them, to fix Cape and Glidden. When Pony goes into the trance, with the help of the drumming, she suddenly channels Lomia through her body and Pony speaks with Lomia's voice. Pony is able to allow things 'in'; this goes back to the notion of the 'underneathness' working in the play. Pony can allow things to go underneath her skin, to go inside of her as she allows the spirit of Lomia to travel through her. With her trances she gets past the surface, gets beyond the 'normal' uses of the body as she allows it to become penetrable.

The ability to allow things in is another crucial concept in the play; to let in feelings, emotions and empathy becomes a means of dividing the characters in the play

between those who let things in and those who don't. Pony is obviously one who does--throughout the play she slowly becomes invaded by Cape--and Glidden too comes to symbolize the penetrable nature of the body. Glidden's invasion is more tangible; he becomes overtaken by disease. As described earlier, Glidden is dying from a disease "contracted from the constant handling of sphagnum moss--gardening was one of his chief pleasures" (The Characters). The invasion of a character by disease is another image Thompson uses in many of her plays, but usually the disease is specified as cancer. Joanne in Lion in the Streets talks of her bone cancer (34) and Alan in The Crackwalker has a long monologue about watching his father suffer with lung cancer (43) . In this play Glidden simply suffers from a 'disease' and we know its source. He became sick through doing something he loved. Therefore, the disease can be understood as a physical manifestation of the kind of life Glidden led. His literal insides, what is happening inside his body becomes a means of dramatizing Glidden's inner struggles. In the character descriptions he is described as a "lightweight" and a man who "In the last few years he has realized that people constantly patronize him and he fights this. Without his wife he has no reason to live" (The Characters). Glidden's struggles in life--against people's attitudes towards him, the loss of his wife--become translated into his disease which he must also fight. The disease becomes a means of analyzing not only Glidden's body but one can also define the disease in terms of his inner personal battles. Through Glidden we see how Thompson breaks down the divisions between the psychological and the physical. What is happening inside Glidden's body is as important and meaningful as what he might say or do. To look inside of someone for Thompson means to show what is happening in the

body as well as the mind. "A lot of our behaviour is almost biologically determined", says Thompson, "If we dive into any individual's inside or interior, we're going to find a lot of thinking about the body. . . ."[10] The physical body becomes another means for Thompson to explore the invisible. The physical is as crucial in showing the truth (which is so important to Thompson) as any other aspect of a character.

Glidden's illness is a constant presence on stage. The moss he carries around inside his shirt through most of the play becomes a physical reminder on stage of Glidden's body being overtaken by the disease/moss. Just as animals throughout Thompson's plays become physical manifestations of a character's inner truth, Glidden's symbolizes an invasion, an overtaking of a character from the inside. Glidden tells Cape: "I'm not...any more, I'm not any more that man who designed ships' engines... made ya wear your hockey helmet, I'm...I'mmm...a rotting tree turning into a swamp, a..." (5). Glidden later sings a little song about his dying aunt's words to him. He repeats her words to him "like a kid's rhyme" as he chants: "Look at the kettle and think of me, I'm water now, I will be steam. I'm water now, I will be steam. That's all it is" (6-7). Both Glidden and his aunt, feeling themselves overtaken from within, express the changing from one form to another--from a tree into a swamp, from water into steam, from a healthy body into a diseased one. They feel themselves becoming something else; not even someone else but something else.

Just as disease can invade a character's body, so can love. Both Glidden and Pony's bodies are penetrated not only through disease or possession, but they allow

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[10] Wachtel, p.39.

themselves to be overtaken by love--Glidden by his former wife Lomia and Pony by Cape. And just as Glidden describes his feeling of his insides turning into something else, Pony too feels herself becoming a different person inside. Because Pony is so open, so able to tap into her own underneathness, she becomes a vessel for Cape's evil and feels herself overwhelmed by it. Near the end of Act One, Cape, in trying to convince Pony not to leave, says he can make her stay "If I put my penis in your sweet sweet thing and I rub it up and down till it bursts?" (50). Not only does Cape want to penetrate her physically but he invades her entirely. Over and over again Pony watches as Cape does evil to his family and she must constantly remind him of the right thing to do. She absorbs his evil like a sponge. At the beginning of Act Two, after they have had sex, Pony talks of this engulfment. She knows she has changed inside and like Glidden's invasion she knows it has made her a different person. She describes the thoughts she had while having sex:

> I was scared 'cause I knew I'd do anything...
> ANYTHING AT ALL...for that...feeling again...
> not just sex. It's the thing with you--didn't
> matter that you're married[...]I was scared
> 'cause I thought I'd do...real...bad for that
> feeling...ANYTHING[...]I know now that I would.
> That something has hatched and--I would...do
> ANYTHING...for...to get that feelin' again.
> That I got with you. (61)

This feeling that she would do ANYTHING for Cape grows within Pony like a disease and she cannot stop it. She finds herself thinking evil thoughts and more and more willing to commit evil deeds to help Cape. Again, something has "hatched" within her, as she says, like a new life, a new person broken out of an egg growing within her. Like Glidden not being able to stay away from his beloved moss she cannot stay away from Cape and

his evil invades her body as Glidden's moss invades his. Pony becomes more and more out of control and when Cape asks if she is all right she answers:

> No. No I'm not okay I don't think I'm okay in
> the least I think I blew a fuse, you know? I
> blew a fuse on account of I'm scared! I'm
> scared 'cause the old me is getting killed off
> by the new me--I'm scared--I'm scared that when
> I say I'd do anything for you that maybe I mean--
> maybe I'd even cut my mum and dad! (crying)
> My mum and--my--see--I've never felt two thoughts
> at once before. (78)

Suddenly she is split. She is no longer the ethical, moral saviour who knows right from wrong. She later explains this to Glidden: "Sir, I would give my eye-teeth to be in the war. At least I would know what the hell I was supposed to do" (92). Inside of her the battle has now begun and she can longer say which side she is on.

It is this split that leads to Pony's suicide at the end of the play. Thompson talks about her possession: "[Pony] understands when she falls in 'love' that something has possessed her, taken her over, and that something can wipe out all her moral character".[11] Near the end of the play we watch Pony struggle to fight this possession, this split, this war within her. She watches Cape humiliate Pascal and in the stage directions we read of her battle: "She is just barely hanging together, feels badness coming on, does 'see no evil' with hands over eyes, trying to fight badness" (83). Pony tries to name her goodness aloud through something tangible, something real she can point to which would signify she was once good. She recalls she won the "Miss Graciousness" award (83) at camp and she then again sings about her beloved dog, much like Cape did, to ward off the evil spirits. In

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[11] Rudakoff, p.93.

a final attempt to stop this possession, she begins eating as if to fill herself up so she cannot be invaded. While the other characters have tea she is off stage and calls out that she cannot join them because she is eating. She re-enters and tells Cape, "I SAID I'M EATING. Can't ya see I'm starving? (comes out with batter all over her face) I'm starving to death, okay? I NEED TO--" (91) and she goes on to deliver a long monologue about having become a "pig girl" (92). It is one of the most horrifying speeches in all of Thompson's work as Pony tells of eating a mixture of flour, cake mix and frozen dog flesh from Lomia's three dead dachshunds. She describes how when she sees Cape the sight of him makes her throw up and she vomits into the cups that she had served as tea (93-94). Instead of being able to reach her underneathness through trance, Pony must now try to reach within herself through bringing up her digested food. Her hope seems to be that this kind of purging will literally clean her insides out. If she rids herself of everything from within, she will then be able to rid herself of the evil growing inside her. It is not, however, her physical 'insides' that have been overtaken. It is something deeper within her that cannot be touched or cleaned out physically.

This last attempt to save herself fails and she receives a message answering her questions, telling her how she can save Cape and help him fulfil his mission. Pony tells Cape, "I'm gonna swoop down inside myself and pull out the old Pony, and I'm gonna give her over to you. And when she's inside you, you're gonna be saved" (102). She then hangs herself, sacrificing herself not only for Cape but to save herself as well. She commits the suicide that Cape could not at the beginning of the play. Pony has one final moment to tell her father her reasons for committing suicide and explains in a monologue

addressed out to "where the projectionist would be if the theatre were a cinema" (106); in other words, out over the heads of the audience and thus explaining her actions almost directly to us as well:

> The main reason I came was to let you know that I didn't... kill myself 'cause I couldn't hack it or because the man I loved couldn't love me back, it was 'cause...I was invaded, Dad, Dad, filled by the worst evil...you ever imagined--I guess it happened when I fell in love, on account of I had to open my mouth so wide to let the love in that the evil came in, too... and living with it was just like being skinned alive; worse pain even than your kidney stones, and we know how bad they were. Now the pain has stopped, and there's still the old Pony to give to my husband [Cape]: cause he needs it, Dad, like a blood transfusion he needs it, and just like Mum would give you anything you needed, I'm gonna give myself to him. (107)

Because she was able to open herself so wide she became a receptacle for Cape. Her ability to get into the underneathness, to hear her urges and follow them allowed her to then become filled with evil and she knew it. She knew herself so well that she could feel herself invaded from the inside.

If Pony and Glidden embody the vessel-like qualities of the body, then Cape and his mother Lomia are the expressions of bodies which are empty, which are not invaded by anything or anyone. In a conversation between Cape and Lomia, Cape confronts his mother about leaving his dying father. She tries to say that she feels things, physically and emotionally, very intensely but Cape can no longer listen to her recite this lie:

> CAPE: You don't feel anything.
>
> LOMIA: What?
>
> CAPE: You've never felt anything! Not on the inside you know that.

> LOMIA: I--what a--weird weird thing to say. Of course I feel, I feel intensely, I--
>
> CAPE: No you don't. Not for others, and neither do I. We can't help it. Nothing-gets-in.
>
> LOMIA: Yes it does, it does get in, it, certainly does it, --no it doesn't you're right. You're right. (56)

For Thompson, these people who feel nothing are very dangerous. She equates them with serial killers because they are able to detach themselves from those around them. For Cape, his detachment manifests itself in charm. In the character descriptions, Thompson describes him as someone "who could seduce almost anybody in twenty minutes. He is compulsively seductive, extremely charming and manipulative" (The Characters). In an interview, not referring specifically to Cape, Thompson states:

> As a psychiatrist I know said to me, anyone who charms me within twenty minutes is a psychopath.[...]So these are people I find horrifying because they can distance themselves from a person and you think they're laughing with you but actually they're watching you. These are the kind of people who, if things go badly for them or they become enraged for some reason, they become the Ted Bundys of the world.[12]

A strong way to describe a charming man but Thompson obviously feels we should fear this kind of man. For Thompson, the pain and damage he can do to a woman seems comparable to the damage a murderer can commit upon his victims. It is through Cape's manipulation/love of Pony that she eventually dies thus confirming the connection between the murderer and the charming man. Love becomes a dangerous weapon in the wrong hands and internal damage becomes as painful and potentially lethal as a murderer's

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[12] Tomc, p.20.

weapon. It is for these empty people that Thompson writes her plays. Cape and Lomia are those 'black holes of people' Thompson feels need to see her plays, to begin to let-things-in. Two of the central concepts in this play are salvation and the importance of feeling for others; this is what Thompson wishes to extend to the audience. If, for Thompson, the theatre should try to accomplish what attending church used to, audience members of this play can be 'saved' by witnessing Pony's difficult journey. The strong nature of this play is crucial to penetrate every audience member and hopefully prevent more Capes and Lomias.

For Lomia, this 'nothing-gets-in' manifests itself through her obsession with "the physical being" (The Characters) as Thompson describes it. Lomia cannot let anything in so she tries to feel and experience life purely through the physical. She tells Cape, "I want to, I try to feel things--I hate it in here, in this--thick--pitch--everything I do, I do to get OUT" (56). She may feel the physical touch of her lover, Pascal, but he doesn't get IN as Cape gets inside Pony. Lomia tries to make her body the part of herself that gets out and lets others in. She is consumed by other people's smells and she refers to her "farting" throughout the play. The only inner life that she can hear inside of her, unlike Pony who hears her urges which tell her what to do, is the workings of her body: "Pascy I can hear my food digesting. I can hear it! I can hear it being broken by the enzymes and floating along in my bloodstream like cows in a flood in India. . . ." (84). Yet these sensations cannot embody a true inner life. Lomia feeling and understanding the workings of her own body cannot replace feeling something for the people around her.

Lomia describes what is inside of her as "thick--pitch" (56) which makes her body

impenetrable. She is filled with something dark and tar-like. She later explains to Pony what her insides feel like:

> PONY: I want to know what it is you have when you walk into a room--you make me feel as though I'm flying in my sleep, you know? Do you--know what that is? Maybe...
>
> LOMIA: It's because I--love being inside of my six layers of skin; its delicious in here--every time I breathe I sort of--breathe out seeds, seeds. I feel-- I inside I feel like...(honest)...like sewage. (68)

Again, Lomia is connected with bodily products--shit/farting/sewage--and she constantly refers to them no matter how inappropriate or socially unacceptable these kinds of references may be. Her relationship with her young lover, Pascal, is strongly connected to what she feels is inside of her. She asks him to treat her badly: "You wanted to be treated like shit. YOU WANTED TO BE TREATED LIKE SHIT!" (87) Pascal tells her and she admits this because this is the only way she could feel anything "...only because when you treated me like...fecal matter", she tells Pascal, "the pins and needles would start...I could begin to...I have never..." (87). Because Lomia's inner self is full of sewage, this becomes the sign of how she wants to be treated in the world. Shit is what is inside, is how she feels inside and only when she is treated badly can she connect how she is treated on the outside to how she feels inside. Like Glidden's, Lomia's personal struggles and feelings are directly linked to the workings of her body. Both want to remain connected to how they feel inside. Their thoughts and actions are directly linked to their physical bodies.

For an audience to watch the two characters who do allow feelings in die at the end of the play makes one ask if it is safe it to be an open person. Pony is destroyed by

Cape and she sacrifices herself for someone who never felt anything for her. After the deaths of both Pony and Glidden, Thompson leaves the audience with some uncertainty around the possibility for change in the final lines of the play:

> (LOMIA looks at CAPE. They both feel, hope, that a change is taking place; deep within them something has cracked. Maybe the only feeling they are experiencing is guilt, but that is something)
>
> CAPE: Do you think it will make...any...difference?
>
> LOMIA looks up. Her hope shows in her eyes. CAPE just does not know. (108)

The achievement of grace in the play comes to Pony only through death showing her audiences how difficult its achievement is. Thompson herself is also one of those people who lets things in, who feels a great deal for the people and the world around her and she too, relates it to sacrifice; sacrificing herself, allowing herself to be penetrated in order for her to, in turn, deeply affect her audiences. In an interview about Lion in the Streets Thompson describes the feelings she experiences as someone who allows herself to tap into the "evil vibrations that are out there":

> I almost felt it was my duty to experience the fear that people have had to experience. I think that ultimately that's good for us. Ultimately, as a culture, we can stop these things if we experience them, if we have to go through what other people have to go through[...]and its not to say I'm this noble Joan of Arc. It's like they forgot to nail in the storm windows in my head! But it's true, sometimes I find it totally unbearable.[13]

The pain and suffering that Pony (and Thompson) experience in order to understand and

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[13] Wachtel, p.38-9.

experience the suffering of others leaves one with a sense of ambivalence around this notion of being an open person.

Robert Nunn pinpoints these dual feelings of the need for openness and the danger that comes with it in the play:

> Evil in this play is the inability to let other people in, a psychopathic indifference to their reality other than as instruments. It is at the same time the power to penetrate and destroy the other. Redemption is possible once that shell cracks, letting love in. Yet Pony's utter lack of shell, her uncompromising openness, lets all of Cape in, to her destruction. The same can be said of Glidden, whose openness to Lomia dooms him. This contradiction is certainly not resolved by the apparently redemptive ending, with two dead bodies sharing the stage with their destroyers. . . .[14]

This contradiction is not resolved at the end of the play because for Thompson the play should not end for the audience inside the theatre. We have witnessed this difficult play, we do not know whether Lomia and Cape will change, so how can we find meaning in the play? Any kind of final fulfilment must now come from ourselves. I quoted Thompson earlier describing how one achieves grace. She said: "Grace is something you achieve. Through work. And Grace is something you have to work and work at".[15] Thompson leaves the contradictions, does not resolve the story thus allowing each audience member to bring the resolution through themselves. If, as an audience member, you have allowed this play 'in', if you have allowed yourself to feel and be affected by the characters then,

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[14] "Spatial Metaphor in the Plays of Judith Thompson". Theatre History in Canada. 10, 1 (Spring 1989), p.16.

[15] Rudakoff, p.103.

Thompson believes, you have felt something for people whom you perhaps did not previously understand. By extending this understanding outside of the theatre, which is Thompson's ultimate wish for someone leaving one of her plays, then perhaps one might be able to stop the kinds of people like Cape who cause pain. If grace is "seeing who you are and changing things" [16], by allowing yourself to be invaded by this play, to feel for these characters, you are hopefully more able, after the play ends, to go into the world and have the desire to change things. In Lion in the Streets, Thompson even more clearly tells the audience that work and the achievement of grace must now begin with them. Isobel's final words to the audience could just as easily be Pony's when she tells us, "I came back. I take my life. I want you all to take your life. I want you all to have your life" (63). Pony's sacrifice is to be a lesson to us but not a fulfilment. It is the end of the play but should only be the beginning of the work for the audience.

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[16] Rudakoff, p.103.

Chapter Two: I Am Yours

Du bist mein
Ich bin dein
Des sollst du gewiss sein
Du bist verschlossen
In meinem Herzen
Verloren ist das Schlusselein
Du musst immer drinnen sein [1]

--Anonymous

Judith Thompson takes the title of I Am Yours, her third play, from an anonymous German medieval poem. In the final scene of Act One, Raymond, Mercy's 'dream man' recites the poem above to himself now "with understanding the significance of the poem" (157) as Thompson explains in the stage directions. What is the significance of the poem? In the play, the line "Ich bin dein" (I am yours) is engraved on two lockets--one given to Dee by her father and one given to Mercy by Raymond in a dream she has. But more important than the giving of the lockets is the desire of the characters for that feeling of belonging--a sense of identity, of belonging to someone else, of knowing therefore who 'I am'. As Robert Nunn writes: "the play is full of lament for lost intimacies which

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[1] Minnesang: Mittelhochdeutsche Texte mit Uebertragungen und Anmerkungen. Ed. Helmut Brackert. (Frankfurt: Fischer Verlag, 1983), p. 8. The poem is from a manuscript from Tegernsee (Bavaria) and dates from the end of the 12th century. It is part of a love letter written in Latin by a young girl to a clergyman, and she finally breaks out in German when her Latin fails her (from Minnesang, p. 280).

momentarily revived that feeling of identity. . . ."[2] The characters--particularly Dee, Mercy and Toi--are all searching for the feeling of knowing who they are through finding some kind of connection to another person. However, as in White Biting Dog, there is also a paradoxical feeling of entrapment or the fear of being possessed by another. The next few lines of the poem express this feeling of imprisonment and these are the words Raymond reads aloud in English: "You are locked in my heart/The key is lost/You will always have to stay inside it/For always" (157). Thompson again portrays love as something that can be dangerous. If you are locked within someone else and the key is lost, how is escape possible? As Pony learned in White Biting Dog, to allow someone 'in' does not always lead to happiness. If 'I am yours' and 'you are mine' (the first line of the poem, the line before "I am yours"), then who are we without the other?

The play thus explores the search for identity and the desire to find someone or something to which a character can say 'I am yours' and 'you are mine'. 'Nothingness' and 'Somethingness' become the words the characters use to express what they feel they are inside (nothing) and what they believe they see inside another person who they feel could fill their own perceived emptiness (something). Characters often describe how they are reduced to nothing, are made to feel invisible by the people and society around them. In the opening monologue of the play, Toilane is not recognized by his parents, is not welcomed into his own home. He is not acknowledged, he is nothing. Mercy also feels this sense of nothingness; she says to Dee, "If you're--a woman and you're--born ugly you

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[2] "Spatial Metaphor in the Plays of Judith Thompson". Theatre History in Canada. 10, 1 (Spring 1989), p.20.

might as well be born dead" (145). Pegs describes several incidents where friends avoid and ignore her (131) , her doctor embarrasses her (130) and at a high school reunion she is not recognized. Pegs tells her friend: "But Marjorie, here I am, I'm Peggy" (164). Dee actually repeats the word "nothing" throughout the play. Her first line of the play is: "There is nothing behind the wall. There is nothing behind the wall." (119) and later in a scene with Mack he asks her about her feelings about him: "Nothing? Is...there's nothing?" and her answer is "Nothing. Nothing. I'm sorry." (125) However, Toilane sees that **something** in her. He tells her, "...you got...somepin...like ME, somepin YOU know, you KNOW" (132). In the following scene, Mercy describes meeting Raymond and recounts how he knew something about her, "He sees what I always knew...that there's something...like a STAR in me, something, like if they REALLY knew me, even the...truly GREAT would love me...cause I got--something..." (133). Characters look for signs from other people--anything that will tell them that this is the person who will love them. Mercy is told by someone that "you only know a guy loves you if he kisses you on the eyelids. Isn't that stupid?" (135). In the following scene Mack kisses her eyelids and Thompson writes in the stage directions that "[Mercy] takes this to have meaning. It doesn't" (136). Mercy hoped that this could be the 'something', the sign that Mack was the one. Toilane says of Dee that when he saw her he felt, "Like something GREEN like FLASH through our guts, together and I knew that I will spend my life, like inter-gutted with this lady. . . ." (123). It is this 'something' that other people can see, both Toi and Mercy describe how this something is seen, that only their mothers seemed to know or saw in them before. Like the locket, these signs, these flashes tell the characters that "Ich

bin dein" (I am yours).

This nothingness or inner emptiness differs from the lack of an inner which existed in Cape and Lomia. Unlike White Biting Dog where Pony came in to help Cape understand the need for feelings, here characters want to feel but struggle throughout the play to understand how or where to find someone whom they can love and feel connected to. In I Am Yours the distinctions between those characters who allow things in and those who do not are not as clear as in White Biting Dog. Thompson explained that with this play she wanted to do "a study of an amoral woman, Dee--I guess you could describe her as sociopathic. . . ."[3] Dee is a character who, like Cape and Lomia, separates herself from her own feelings and from the people around her. Here, Thompson examines what happens when something is forced in, when a person who tries to distance herself from emotion is filled from within by a baby. The family unit is again used to examine how her characters relate to the world but this time the circle becomes wider--we see Dee and Mercy's family relationships and the relationship between mother and son with Toi and Pegs; the family becomes the place to examine notions of identity. Both parents and children look for ways to replace that first connection in life, the relationship particularly between mother and child. One's initial sense of identity and belonging in the world comes from this relationship. Throughout the play characters try to understand how they can find someone else they can truly connect with as they did with their mother. Characters struggle to make connections and Pony is not there to teach them how.

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[3] Tomc, Sandra. "Revisions of Probability". Canadian Theatre Review. 59, (Summer 1989), p.19.

Due to this emphasis on the need to make connections in the world Thompson strengthens the relationship between the audience and the characters. Like Cape in White Biting Dog, the characters in I Am Yours are on a mission to understand something within themselves but the audience of this play is asked to become more involved in this mission. We are addressed throughout the play--the stage directions specify a "ramp that juts out into the audience" (119)--and we are even given different 'roles'. In the opening monologue, Thompson writes in the stage directions that "The audience should serve as the door" (119). Dee later "addresses the audience as if it is the fetus" (143) and at the end of the play we again play the role of Dee's baby as she "sees the baby somewhere in the audience (not picking out an individual of course)" (176). Other characters also address the audience in monologues but the role of the audience is not specified. Because we are given roles to play, we are not allowed to sit in the dark to judge and evaluate these characters from a distance. We become a part of the play; we become characters, even props. We are acknowledged and implicated in the journeys of the characters. From the opening of the play the audience's identity is then acknowledged. We are recognized, implicated and given various roles throughout the play.

The journey of the play begins with Toi and as in White Biting Dog, the opening scene immediately establishes the world in which this play will exist. The scene begins with Toilane (also called Toi) in dream and he speaks as a six year old child. This first scene is strikingly similar to Isobel's opening monologue in Lion. Here it is Toi who is 'looost', is looking for where he should be. He too finds that his 'house is not his house' much as a frightened Isobel did:

(The stage is dark. Toilane walks slowly toward the audience, on a ramp that juts out into the audience. He is his six-year-old self, in a dream he is having as an adult. He is walking up to what he sees as a giant door, the door of his own home.)

Toilane: Mum! Muum, I'm home!
Hey, Mum, I'm home!
Where's my mummy?
But this is my house! I live here. (pause)
I do so! I do so live here! I do so live here!
I do so! My parents are in there! I do so live here, they're in there! I do live here, I do live here! I do live here! I do live here!

(The 'door' slams. The audience should serve as the door. Do not bring in a real one.) (119)

Immediately the audience is implicated in the action as Toi tries to convince us that he does belong here. We serve as the door which slams in his face. We are the object stopping Toi from regaining that feeling of belonging that his house and mother used to bring him. He tries, much as Isobel did, to convince us that this is his home. Presumably, if the audience is the door, then the rest of the theatre is his house, is the "in there" where his parents are. Thus the audience becomes the obstacle both physically and in Toi's dream world, between he and his parents. The audience is made responsible for a character's feeling of loss. In White Biting Dog the audience acts more as a witness to the events. The audience is spoken to in monologues but not made to feel any responsibility for the action on stage. In this play, our presence is not only acknowledged but we are almost engaged in a conversation with a character. Toi desperately tries to tell us that he 'does so' live here but we cannot help him nor can we fully understand his dilemma because this is the opening scene of the play. In White Biting Dog we are never addressed

as any specific being; the closest we come is at the end of the play when Pony looks into the audience to speak to her father up "to where the projectionist would be if the theatre were a cinema" (106) which would presumably be over the heads of the audience. But here, Toi speaks directly to us. Our presence is recognized and our identity changes throughout the play.

The audience's unstable and changing identity and the anxiety inherent in the lack of stability is present both in the audience and on stage. Characters, as much as the audience, are often uncertain about what happens in dream, in nightmare, or in their waking hours. Dee speaks of the fear of her dream/ nightmare world overtaking her: "I'm afraid. I'm afraid that the dreams will seep into the day. That I'll do things--that I'll..." (141). George Toles writes: "The dream experience so dominates the 'waking sense' of the 'separate adult space' that it soon establishes itself as the primary reality".[4] This dream-like quality of the scenes allows Thompson to explore areas of thought and feeling which are not discussed in everyday living. This is her method to delve into the "underneathness" as Pony calls it. The world of dream is what allows everything to stop seeming so 'normal'. Dream is also another key concept for Thompson; as I quoted in the introduction, she hopes her audiences will experience the plays as a dream: "They're your dreams, but it seems as if they're just happening to you. And that's what the ideal theatrical experience is for me".[5] The establishment of this dream-like existence then

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[4] "'Cause You're the Only One I Want'". Canadian Literature 118, (Autumn 1989), p. 129.

[5] Tomc, p.19.

allows what may seem 'unreal' to occur. Toi's opening monologue--a grown man speaking as a child--is one example of both the unreal which can occur on stage and the instability of character. In all three plays a character speaks as if in childhood: Pony in a trance becomes "her twelve-year-old self giving a speech" (47), and Isobel in Lion only becomes herself as an adult at the end of the play. Adult characters becoming children further emphasizes the performative and transformative nature of identity in her plays. In one scene, Thompson leaves the question of whether the scene is really taking place or not unanswered. "This could be a dream" (171) is all she states before a scene between Raymond and Mercy. Earlier in the play Mercy asks the audience, "Did you ever wake up, well not quite wake up and you can't remember where you are?" (119). The feeling of waking up, but not quite waking up, defines the mood or world of this play. Anyone can become anything at any moment--unities of time, place or character are all abandoned from the first moments of her plays.

The nature of Toi's dream--the desire for home, the desire for mother and the search for something or someone which can provide the feelings home and mother did (or should)--becomes a central focus of the three main characters. Thompson has all three characters 'share' this dream in the first two scenes of the play. Although Toi is the only character to speak the lines, Dee and Mercy, in separate locations, have the same dream:

> Mercy, on a bus, on her way to visit Dee, her sister,
> sitting next to a stranger, is having the same dream,
> about herself walking up to that door. She startles
> awake from the slam of the door. Dee, in her apartment,
> has also been having the same dream, but she can be
> standing. . . (119)

The sharing of the dream highlights another important concept for Thompson. She strongly believes in the Jungian idea of the collective unconscious and the idea that we all share certain dreams, thoughts or feelings. It is this collective unconscious which Thompson tries to connect to in her work:

> You become aware of an amazing sort of synchronicity going on when you talk to other artists, or cross time. It's the opposite of the Marxist view that everything is contextual. The idea is that people in, say, Egypt thousands of years ago, reacted in the same way that people now do to certain things. I believe that. Otherwise, I'd just give up. I really believe that if the thing is clear enough there is an emotional sameness in the response to it. Everyone likes babies, for example, and you can start with things as primitive and obvious as that.[6]

In the play, Dee, Mercy and Toi share the dream of looking for mother. Although Dee and Mercy have not yet met Toi at this point in the play they have the same dream. They all search for a home and the journeys of the characters through the play becomes a search for the fulfilment of this dream. Mercy later expresses how her relationship with her mother made her feel and this speech pinpoints what the loss of the mother/child relationship means to all three characters--how it provided them with an identity, a sense of belonging, a sense of knowing where they belonged in the world. Mercy screams at Dee:

> I want...to be the centre, I want to be the centre of somebody's life. I haven't been the centre since Mum died, she made me the centre, she sat up when I came in she asked me what I got at the store and how

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[6] Zimmerman, Cynthia. "A Conversation with Judith Thompson". Canadian Drama. Vol. 16, no.2 (1990), p.186.

> was the bank today and didn't think I was overqualified
> for my work. She said I looked tired and it was too
> cold for me out there and nobody does that! NOBODY!
> (150)

Similarly in Christine's speech to Scarlett in Lion she asks, "The way you, you, you talked to me like[...]like you belong. In the world. As if you belong. Where did you get that feeling? I want it. I need it" (49), Mercy expresses the desire to find her place in the world. Here it is stated in terms of loss, something that she once had but that NOBODY can or does provide for her anymore. When she was young, she knew what her place was--she was the centre of her mother's life--but there is nobody who can do that for her again. The search for that kind of relationship is what propels the characters through the play. Although Dee's mother did not provide this for Dee, her father did by giving her the locket with the "Ich bin dein" inscription on it. Mercy refers to the locket as something her father gave to Dee for their "special club" (156)--again, the 'club' signifying a sense of belonging to something, knowing your place, of being identifiable. But dramatically, the question becomes, at what price does this belonging come?

To allow oneself to belong to another or to allow another to become a part of you is thought of with both longing and fear in the play. Dee expresses these dual feelings in a scene with Mack as she begs him, "Please stay, please stay! Go! Get out, get out! Stay! Go!" (127). Looking again at the German poem, if you are locked within and the key is lost, how is escape possible, for either person, without pain? The desire to find one's identity within another person is always mixed with the fear of this pain. Mercy expressed her desire to be the centre of someone's life as she was the centre of her mother's life. She

has now lost this person inside of whom she was 'locked' and now feels lost. In the scene following Mercy's speech, Pegs describes the pain of losing a child from the centre of her life. Pegs has watched her child grow up and with that, a loss of someone whom she was a part of and who was a part of her:

> Your children are only loaned to you [...]It comes as quite a shock to us, you know, us girls who been brought up to think family is our whole life and ya grow up and ya get married and ya start havin kids and you are in your prime, man, [...]you're the most powerful thing there is, a mother, [...] You're important, you're an important member of society . . . .(151-2)

She then describes the slow distancing between mother and child as the child begins to develop their own identity, separate from their mother, as every child must do. Pegs, a mother, has also lost something. She has lost not only that powerful position she felt as a mother in a community, but also that child, that 'look' as she calls it when she asks at the end of the monologue, "Why is it that look goes away?" (151)

Pegs' monologue is also filled with a feeling of anger, of resentment at this loss of being the centre of her child's life. As with White Biting Dog where to allow someone in is both important but dangerous, in this play motherhood is a means of both gaining and losing one's sense of identity. From pregnancy and the fear of being overtaken by this separate but not separate thing inside to the pain of childbirth to the loss of the child as it grows up; for the mothers in the play each of these phases can be overwhelmingly painful. The desire for identity--as mother, as centre--mixed with the anxiety that comes with motherhood. If motherhood means fulfilment (as Pegs calls it being in 'your prime, man')

it can also mean that one becomes 'filled' with someone else, to be overtaken by them. Julia Kristeva describes pregnancy in these terms: "Cells fuse," she writes, "split, and proliferate; volumes grow, tissues, stretch, and body fluids change rhythm, speeding up or slowing down. Within the body, growing as a graft, indomitable, there is an other".[7] When this other leaves, what can fill that (w)hole again?

Although it is not only the women in the play who search for identity through 'mother', only the women have their own potential motherhood to face. This notion is explored specifically through Dee. Kristeva writes about motherhood and how it connects a daughter to her mother: "By giving birth, the woman enters into contact with her mother; she becomes, she is her own mother; they are the same continuity differentiating itself".[8] Dee's relationship with her mother was not a good one so this re-connection with her now dead mother is even more difficult. Dee must come into contact with her mother again only through her body, through her pregnancy. Dee, like Cape and Lomia, has a fear of letting things in. She fights love, she struggles particularly against Mack, trying convince him and herself that she does not love him, that there is no connection. She is afraid of how this kind of emotion can overwhelm her so motherhood represents another means by which she is invaded, overtaken--a concrete expression of her fears which she explained to her family as the creature behind the wall, her animal (which later emerges as a lion, a recurring image in Thompson's plays). Dee can be seen as being

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[7] "Motherhood According to Giovanni Bellini". Desire in Language. (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1980), p.237.

[8] Kristeva, p.239.

invaded by several distinct identities--her own child, her dead mother and the lion. What is it that the lion expresses? The lion rears its head from the opening of the play, as Dee has the same dream as Toi and Mercy, she is also "willing 'the creature' that torments her imagination to stay behind the wall, and not enter her being" (119). This lion is about more than her pregnancy, she has had this fear for a long time but somehow it is pregnancy that brings the fear more to the surface. Mercy warns Dee not to have this baby:

> I mean, a man would bring this thing forth, wouldn't
> he? Or a baby. Dee, you musn't have a baby. [...]
> Who knows what you could do. You could do horrible
> things. Mum knew that about you--Dee? Knife old
> ladies in the head. Screw old winos in the park.
> When people let their animal out they go to the
> top of tall buildings and shoot forty people. (141)

It seems then that it is the overtaking of Dee by emotion that 'brings this thing forth'--love from a man or having a baby--so then she must express or rid herself of this excess by perpetrating a violent expression of emotion on others. Again, as Thompson does with disease and bodily fluids, an animal becomes an expression, a way for her characters to express a fear, a thought, a nightmare which is not easily described in words. A lion becomes a way for Thompson, with Dee, to express the fear of emotion, more specifically, the fear of emotion overtaking someone. Thompson explains this animal:

> [Dee's] terrified of anything taking over her,
> and this is represented by the animal behind the
> wall. So when that's translated into the body,
> she fears pregnancy because it is an idea that has
> always frightened her. She's the same with emotion.
> She's never allowed any real emotion to come to
> the surface and when it does come out, it takes

this bizarre form.[9]

Pregnancy allows this animal to come out--like the bees behind the wall that Mack describes in the scene following the one between Dee and Mercy--first it came out occasionally, slowly but it built up and built up inside of Dee until it came roaring out of her.

The pregnancy is further externalized through Dee's paintings which transform throughout the play. As Thompson uses art or a picture to encapsulate Joanne's fears and thoughts about death in Lion in the Streets, Thompson gives Dee another means of externalizing and signifying what is normally invisible and internal. The painting starts as a black blob to depict the animal within (123) and becomes a reproduction of a pregnancy test (142) to three depictions of the fetus within her, changing from grotesque (143) to beautiful (146) and back to grotesque (164) when the fetus reaches nine months. Like Joanne who tries to neatly frame her own cancer through reproducing an Ophelia painting, Dee also tries to frame what is growing inside of her by re-painting, re-framing her possession/pregnancy, in an attempt to control it. Poetry, song, painting--all become ways within Thompson's theatre, to express or to capture and then frame something within. The audience can then see it all, can hear it all and it begins to feel as if Dee is turned inside out for us to examine. Everything about Dee seems to be external, to be outside of her for us to analyze and examine. As with all of Thompson's plays, words are not all that the audience has to use to evaluate the characters. The physical is always as externalized as the spoken dialogue. With Glidden it was peat moss which expressed both the invasion

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[9] Tomc, p.19.

of his body from within and his inner personal battles. With Dee not only is her swollen belly a physical manifestation of her fear of possession but she paints what is inside her on a canvas for everyone to see. The lion, another signifier of her internal, is also always present behind the wall.

When Dee finally does give birth at the end of the play, the worlds of dream/nightmare and reality become even more intertwined. As the labour pains start she feels the animal crushing her and, as she had always feared, finally killing her. For Dee, the dream world which she felt overtaking her has now become reality and she tries to wake up out of it: "I died and I'm in hell, or I know! It's a dream, that's what it is, a terrible nightmare, oh God, oh AGHHHHH. LET ME WAKE UP PLEASE LET ME WAKE UP" (170). The next scene extends this confusing or mixing of dream and reality because Thompson writes that this scene between Mercy and Raymond "could be a dream" (171). The notion of dream is repeated in several of the final scenes of the play. Mercy tells Raymond that she has had many dreams about him (171) and he later says that he dreamed of her too (174). Again, like the image of the bees behind the wall (142), everything seems to 'break through' in the final scenes of the play and it all begins as Dee begins to give birth. The characters' dream and nightmare worlds have now completely broken through into their waking hours and we watch as dreams are both fulfilled and broken.

With the birth of the baby, both Dee and Toi finally confront that relationship which propelled their actions throughout the play. Toi gains the child that fills his own emptiness that we heard about in the first scene. He describes his daughter as filling

something up within him, as he tells his mother when he looks at his daughter: "It's like there's a well, you know and when I seen her, Tracy? Something pumped that water up and it filled my whole head, you know, it filled my whole head!" (173) Dee also must finally allow the animal out (in the form of her baby) and also comes into contact again with her mother in a profound, physical way--through childbirth. After giving birth she tells Mercy, "I want to talk to my mother. I want to talk to my mother. [...]I know she's dead, I know she's dead but I want to talk to her..." (174). Both Toi and Dee gain and lose a piece of that significant child/mother relationship by the end of the play. In Dee's final scene, she looks out into the audience and "sees the baby somewhere in the audience" (176) although the child has been kidnapped by Toi and Pegs. In the last scene, following Dee, Pegs is "maybe dead" (176) and Toilane simply calls out, "Mum??" (176) much as he did in the first scene of the play. Robert Nunn describes the final scenes:

> We see a montage of the severed bond between Toilane and Pegs and the imaginary bond between Dee and the baby (who is not there). The fact that Dee's greeting is directed to every single person sitting in the theatre includes the whole audience in a dialectic of desire and absence.[10]

The searches for identity, for mother, for connections are both satisfied and destroyed by the end of the play. Thompson, as she did in the first scene, includes the audience in this loss/ fulfilment with this final scene. The audience began the play as the mother who would not recognize her child and we end the play as a baby who is not really there. This ending satisfies both the desire for and the fear of resolving the mother/child relationship

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[10] "Spatial Metaphor in the Plays of Judith Thompson", p. 18.

expressed throughout the play. Although we are not given insight into what Toi has gained from his journey, Thompson describes Dee's internal state after giving birth:

> She feels purified--through birth--and also through understanding her self-hatred, her guilt about her mother--she is now able to love after having grappled with her 'shadow' or 'animal'. She is infused with this love. (176)

Like Cape and Lomia at the end of White Biting Dog, there is some hope but also much uncertainty at the end of the play. There is that lack of fulfilment or lack of closure present in White Biting Dog but to an even stronger degree in this play. But if the audience is to gain anything from watching this play, we have seen once again the difficulty in facing one's inner truths and fears. Dee, like Pony, has also achieved grace at the end of the play. She has faced her inner thoughts and fears and has gained both understanding and love.

Chapter Three: Lion in the Streets

In White Biting Dog and I Am Yours, Thompson closely examined the family unit as a microcosm for examining the world. With Lion in the Streets, Thompson is no longer examining one or two families but a neighbourhood--a community of families--thereby allowing the audience to glimpse briefly into the lives of 28 characters. Her world explodes wide open and we are led through the neighbourhood by Isobel, the ghost of a nine year old girl who was murdered seventeen years ago. Thompson describes Isobel's movement through the play:

> I suppose it's Isobel's journey-odyssey through
> an ordinary neighbourhood[...]She descends into
> the underworld of these lives, what we don't see.
> You're walking down the street and you see lights
> and houses and you peek through and see a tele-
> vision or a little dinner party going on, but
> what's happening really, inside each life?[1]

Isobel's position as a ghost allows her to take the audience into the lives of her neighbours. Sometimes she is seen by other characters but more often she is an invisible observer, watching the often horrible acts characters commit upon each other. The scenes are short, intense, often beginning very innocently but ending in terrible violence. In this play there is not one story, no one narrative to follow--the only constant is this little girl who herself

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[1] Wachtel, Eleanor. "An Interview with Judith Thompson". Brick 41, (Summer 1991), p.37.

was the victim of violence. Critics have called it a play about a "society in crisis"[2] and that "the connecting subject is victimization"[3]; many of the characters can be seen as victims or outcasts to one degree or another--gay men, immigrants, lower-class women, disabled women. The violence we witness in every scene becomes almost an inevitable expression of an attempt to break out of the power structures oppressing these people. In all of her plays the sense of violence is a constant presence beneath the surface--Cape's violence towards Pascal and his mother, Dee's sudden fits or rages, always exist like bees buzzing behind the wall. In Lion in the Streets this ever present violence erupts to the surface. The war which Thompson feels is present within and around us becomes literalized in many scenes and in the animalistic images throughout the play, symbolized most obviously by the lion of the title. These images are also connected to the violence, particularly the sudden, extreme and brutal nature of the acts people commit in the play. But Isobel, like Pony and Dee, finds her own salvation or fulfilment at the end of the play. If Thompson is able to express the violence present around and within us she is also able to show the hope, the truth she wants us all to seek and the grace that she wants us to work for.

Thompson begins this play with another lost child but before Thompson introduces Isobel to the audience we watch as she "runs around and around in a large circle, to music, terrified of a remembered pursuer" (15) but "at this point Isobel does not know she is a

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[2] Wilson, Ann. "The Culture of Abuse". Contemporary Issues in Canadian Drama. Ed. Per Brask (Winnipeg: Blizzard Publishing, 1994), p. 167.

[3] Zimmerman, Cynthia. "Judith Thompson" in Playwrighting Women. (Toronto: Simon and Pierre Publishing, 1994), p.201.

ghost, but she knows that something is terribly wrong" (15). We also do not know she is a ghost. We watch her try to understand who she is and where she is, just as we are doing the same thing. She tries to explain herself, to convince us that we know her:

> Is my house, is my street, is my park, is my people! You know me, you know me very hard! I live next house to you, with my brothers and sisters, Maria, Luig, Carla and Romeo we play with your girl, your boy, you know me, you know me very hard. But...when did tha be? Tha not be now! Tha not be today! I think tha be very long years ago I think I be old. I think I be very old. Is my house but is not my house is my street but is not my street my people is gone I am lost. I am lost. I AM LOOOOOOOST!! (15)

Like Toi who thinks he has found his home and his mother, Isobel also thinks that this is her house, her street, her park, her "people" as she calls them. But also like Toi she soon realizes that this is not her home, this is not where she is supposed to be. Thompson has set up another character on a mission but unlike Toi, Isobel is not in a dream--she truly is lost. She is a ghost who does not know she is dead. Isobel is not just searching for 'mummy' as Toi calls out in his monologue; Isobel has lost everything. How did she become lost? Her whole world is uncertain and her journey through the play is her search to rediscover her place in the world.

Thompson begins with an unstable picture: is Isobel really there or is she a ghost? It is her house but not her house, her street but not her street--where are we then? To begin a play from this position of uncertainty or instability immediately forces the audience to find a new way to try to understand this play. If Isobel is to become the figure the

audience is meant to identify with, how can we identify with someone who is uncertain of whom or where she is? She becomes the person we follow throughout the play, the person who should lead us through this neighbourhood but she herself is unstable, uncertain, confused. We also can't be sure of who she is supposed to be--in all previous productions to date the part of Isobel has been played by an adult actor. The audience then sees a woman speaking and behaving like a little girl--a convention Thompson used in both White Biting Dog and I Am Yours--but here it is not a momentary 'trance' or 'dream' that brings the child forth. This is a woman who does not know she has died seventeen years earlier. Thompson is always interested in playing with character and in her plays characters often transform on stage, thus highlighting the changeable and therefore unsteady notion of character in her plays. Here, this instability--personified by the child/woman figure of Isobel--is a permanent fixture on stage reminding the audience of the instability of character and identity.

For me, it is this notion of Isobel's uncertainty which extends into the audience that Thompson is referring to when she explains the structure of the play. In the introduction to the text of the play she is quoted: "I just couldn't cope with the idea of a huge body of narrative[...]I started to find that kind of narrative tedious because your expectations are usually fulfilled" (9). Instead of a huge body we are given parts of a body without a climax. There is not one story to follow but we are given small glimpses into many different stories which are not resolved. There is no fixed mark, no stable character to refer back to in order to find meaning or understanding. Perhaps in a more traditional play with this episodic structure Isobel would be the fixed centre of this play; she would be the

all-seeing character who could turn to the audience and explain, reassure or re-orient us for the scene to come. But this is a ghost who does not realize she is dead. She is looooost, Thompson describes her as "deranged" (15), she is Portuguese so her English is at times difficult to understand, and she is an outcast in this neighbourhood as the scene following her opening monologue demonstrates. She is as outside of the scenes as the audience. She will not bring us explanations, will not make things easier for us to understand. Not only can she not help us but she turns to us for help. At one point she turns to the audience and desperately asks:

> Hey! Who gonna take me home? You? You gotta car? What kinda car you got? Trans-Am? What about bus tickets? You gotta bus tickets? C'mon. Come on. COME ON. SOMEBODY. What I'm sposed to do, ha? Who gonna take me home? Who gonna take me home? (25)

The audience is not allowed sit back but is questioned: what are we doing here? What are we going to do to help this girl? Even more than in I Am Yours the audience is clearly implicated in the outcome of Isobel's journey.

Isobel's challenge to the audience puts into question the audience's position in watching the play. From the first lines of the play, "Isobel: Doan be scare. Doan be scare. (turns to audience) Doan be scare of this pickshur" (15), the audience is addressed and made aware of the framework of this play. Thompson points to the 'picture' she has created for the audience and has a character tell us that she knows it is a picture. This opening moment disrupts any notion of superiority the audience may adopt in interpreting the play. In scene after scene meaning, reality and identity are constantly challenged so

the role or identity of the audience is also challenged, both as individual audience members and as player in the play/audience dynamic. Jennifer Harvie writes: "Through constant interruption the audience may come to perceive its sense of identification and resolution in any given scene as always merely provisional, a possibility which further suggests all perceptions of identity should be considered provisional".[4] It is this feeling of provisionality that I am referring to when I refer to the notion of instability present in the play. We are constantly reminded that what we see can and does change throughout the play--nothing is fixed, everything is questionable and therefore changeable. This feeling of instability is as true for the characters as it is for the audience--provisionality or instability is always present in both form and content. Outside of the play, the audience cannot watch from a position of authority and Isobel, also as an audience to the events on stage becomes symbolic of this lack of authority. We are also not invited 'inside' the world; we only look at pictures that we may understand individually but as a whole the play does not take us on a well-made journey. Then within the play, within the pictures the characters are all questioning the pictures of themselves they have created, would like to create or which have been created for them.

What are we to understand from witnessing the struggles of Isobel and the people in her neighbourhood? In this play more than any other, Thompson articulates through Isobel what she wants her audience to gain from watching the actions of her characters. The play's structure and Thompson's desire not to fulfil the expectations of her audience

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[4] "Constructing Fictions of an Essential Reality". Theatre Research in Canada. Vol 13, no. 1 and 2 (Spring and Fall 1992), p.89.

are explained by Isobel at the end of the play. She becomes herself as an adult after forgiving her murderer and turns to the audience and tells us: "Talk and talk and never be quiet never be quiet. I take my life. I want you all to take your life. I want you all to have your life" (63). One could argue that Isobel's ascension to heaven leads to a kind of fulfilment for the audience but Isobel reminds us that just because she has 'taken' her life does not mean that the work in the minds of the audience should end. Isobel's triumph cannot be made our own; rather it should make us look at our own feelings of victimhood--a central theme in the play. Thompson explains, "I guess so many of us allow ourselves to be victims; we let the blood be sucked out of us. It's as if there's a giant straw and I want to say, 'suck it back!'".[5] Looking again at Thompson's notion of grace; in all three plays we watch as characters struggle to save themselves--like Pony and Dee--but in this play as Isobel watches others struggle we learn, through experiencing struggle, how we can overcome our own senses of victimhood. For me this play most clearly highlights the audience's need to do the work to achieve grace outside of the theatre. For an audience member, the result of watching Thompson's plays should not be a sense of satisfaction, not a means of resolution but a beginning of effort on the part of the audience.

In addition to examining notions of identity, in this play, as in all of Thompson's plays, the body becomes another place of exploration. If characters can question and challenge who they are or what they choose to be then the body has those same properties; the body also becomes something that is questionable, not simply accepted.

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[5] Zimmerman, Cynthia. "A Conversation with Judith Thompson". Canadian Drama. Vol. 16, no.2 (1990), p.192.

Thompson challenges not only who we are or what we perform but also how we perform both biologically and physically as well. The body is not left as a stable means of identifying ourselves and each other but is as changeable and unstable as our identities. De-stabilizing notions about the body can then become another arena where salvation can be found. Through challenging everything, including the limitations of the body, characters can challenge society's notions of what their identities should be--a concept discussed in feminist theory. Judith Butler, in "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory", discusses the constructed and performative nature of gender:

> If the ground of gender identity is the stylized repetition of acts through time, and not a seemingly seamless identity, then the possibilities of gender transformation are to be found in the arbitrary relation between such acts, in the possibility of a different sort of repeating, in the breaking or subversive repetition of that style.[6]

Subverting perceived expectations of both the body and identity are key for Thompson in the play--to go beyond the limitations of the body becomes then the means of transformation and, ultimately, power. Isobel's presence on stage is a constant challenge to the 'realities' of the body; this is a little girl but she is a woman. She is dead but she is alive. Her brutal murder reminds us of the all too real limitations of the body but by challenging these limitations Isobel triumphs at the end of the play. Again, Isobel's final words illustrate how challenging the body can bring one salvation:

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[6] Performing Feminisms. Ed. Sue-Ellen Case. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), p.271.

> I was dead, was killed by lion in long silver car,
> starving lion, maul maul maul me to dead, with
> killing claws over and over my little young face
> and chest, over my chest my blood running out he
> take my heart with. He take my heart with in his
> pocket deep, but my heart talk. Talk and talk and
> talk and never be quiet. I came back. I take my
> life. (63)

For Pony too, death becomes a way to 'take her life' back after she has lost it to Cape; she too comes back after her death to tell the audience (and her father) what her death meant. Dee's body is also challenged, through pregnancy, and she also takes her life by now being able to love. In all these cases confronting the limitations of the body becomes a way of finding happiness, of escaping pain or suffering and, again, power.

One means of challenging the body which we have seen in other Thompson plays is the invasion of one character by another, a kind of possession. In the scene following the very public break-up of Sue's marriage, Laura and George begin discussing their maid Maria, Isobel's mother. George playfully wraps a tablecloth around his head and begins to imitate Maria's accent. Suddenly, indicated only in stage directions, George's name becomes "George/Maria" (26) and then simply "Maria" (26). George's mock performance of Maria is suddenly made 'real' as Maria then recounts the death of her husband and describes how she was able to enter his body:

> I fold clothes one pile for Antony, one pile for me
> one for Maria, Romeo, ISOBEL and Luig, my hands fold
> the clothes but my...(gesture indicating self or soul)
> [...]Like I fold myself too, and I go in his body,
> maybe, you know, his...hand to, wipe off his face
> when he hot and too sweat I am there; (27)

Thompson indicates in the stage directions how the rest of the monologue should be

performed: "She walks operatically downstage and delivers the rest of the speech, which should be like an aria" (27). Here, it is love that allows Maria to 'go into' her husband, just as Cape was able to enter Pony. Many boundaries are broken here and many levels of performativity are produced. George's enactment of Maria plays with gender in Thompson's simple switch from George to 'she'. The actor playing George suddenly is Maria with no real acknowledgement in the world of the play. Isobel also recognizes George as her mother but again, this is only indicated in the stage directions as "Isobel falls on an imaginary track in front of her mother" (27). Then Maria talks of being able to enter her husband, highlighting how Thompson challenges the conceptions of what the body can or cannot do. Maria then performs the rest of her speech, emphasizing its performativity by stepping downstage and delivering it 'like an aria'. Both inside and outside the play, performativity and unstable notions of identity are produced.

For many characters this instability of identity develops into a struggle, an internal war which becomes literalized on stage. Pony fights her invasion, Dee struggles against the animal within but ultimately the questions are about identity. Each character seems to be asking themselves: what makes me what I am? Where in this war am I? Which side am I on? A sense of instability resulting from this war within the characters forces them to examine the basis of their identities. In Act Two of Lion in the Streets, Christine, a reporter interviews Scarlett, a woman with cerebral palsy. What begins as an interview for a human interest piece on the life of a 'handicapped woman' ends with Christine brutally beating Scarlett. Instead of being able to write a story on a woman whom Christine assumes sits at home and watches soap operas, Scarlett describes a life which does not fit

neatly into Christine's story. She tells Christine, "I screw my brains out.[...]You think I sit around and watch game shows and uh stare out the window waitin for the next volunteer? No way girlie, I git it ONNN" (46). She tells Christine to just write "the crap about how noble I am copin on my own and that shit, and how good the United Church is helpin me out, all that shit right?" (46). This is what the readers would expect, what most would want to read in this article, what the audience of this play expects but Scarlett does not live that life, does not fit that picture. At the end of the interview Scarlett tells Christine she will go to hell and begins to taunt her. This is when Christine begins to beat Scarlett out of a raging frustration based on jealousy of Scarlett. After beating her Christine tells Scarlett:

> You shouldn't have made me do that, Scarlett.
> You shouldn't have made me kick you like that.
> The way you, you, you talked to me like that.
> Like, like, like you belong. In the world. As
> if you belong. Where did you get that feeling?
> I want it. I need it.[...]I need it. (49)

This is the clearest expression in the play of the frustration the characters feel because of their inability to clearly define themselves within the world. Christine literally acts out this 'war' on Scarlett, physicalizes the brutality inherent in a war because she cannot find her own place in the world.

Scarlett is able to find her place through fantasy, to escape what would seem to be a trap--her body made immobile by cerebral palsy. Scarlett is even able to dance with her lover as she tells Christine: "I am movin, I know I am, I am turnin and swishin and holdin" (47). She says she has never seen this man but for Scarlett this is not important: "Why do

you think it's so big to see your boyfriend two eyes, nose, a mouth, what the diff..." (47-8). Limitations of the body do not prevent Scarlett from living the kind of life she wants to live. Does this man really exist? The audience sees a man enter and "He and Scarlett dance romantically around the set. He leaves her back in her chair, immobile and exits" (47). Again, does he really exist? By Thompson having this man actually appear on stage to dance with Scarlett she forces the audience to question what is 'real' or what is not. Scarlett may not physically be able to dance with him but in the world of the play he is able to enter her apartment to dance with her only for the audience to see. It is clear that Christine does not see this enactment of the dance so this is for the audience, for us to glimpse into Scarlett's picture of herself. Thompson collapses the line between reality and fantasy just as in White Biting Dog where the distinctions between inner, private thoughts and outer behaviour were eliminated. Here, as in White Biting Dog, what Scarlett dreams and imagines occurs on stage--what she thinks inside is enacted on stage. She does not conform to Christine's picture of her and the audience is allowed to witness not only Scarlett's defiance of Christine's picture of her but also how she defies the limitations of her own body.

The violent ending to this scene (the beating to death of Scarlett by Christine) is present in many scenes of the play. Even the most innocent scenes contain an element of violence. As Sue reads a story about a starfish to her little son Timmy, he suddenly says to his mother, "I think tonight's the night.[...] That we're all gonna die. Tonight's the night we're gonna die" (19). The scene between Rodney and Michael is another example of this sudden and extreme violence. Michael finds Rodney at his office and reminds him of their

friendship in childhood--their fly collection, their games of chess--and slowly begins caressing him and eventually the two men embrace. Suddenly, Michael lashes out at Rodney. For Michael, the thought of Rodney remembering their friendship angers him, sickens him to the point of violence:

> FAIRY SISSY LITTLE CREEP!! DON'T YOU EVER ever remember again. YOU have WRECKED my life, your slimy memory, using me over and over and over again like an old porno magazine you will RELINQUISH that memory you will wipe it out, you understand?[...] I could feel you remembering almost daily[...]I would feel you...holding my memory turning it over and over, folding it caressing it, reliving it, SPEWING, spewing your filth all over me. (53)

Rodney 'uses' Michael as relief, like a porno magazine and Michael tries to take control of this. Rodney and Michael fight and as Michael pulls out a knife, "Rodney takes it from him and cuts his throat. Michael dies.[...]The actor playing Michael gets up and exits" (53). By indicating the dead character's exit from the stage, Thompson insists on breaking the reality of the scene. The audience may again ask if this scene actually took place. We know that Scarlett couldn't really dance with her midnight man but Rodney could have really killed Michael--does that mean that this scene is 'more real'? Thompson also makes a distinction between the deaths in the two scenes. In the Scarlett/ Christine scene we never see Scarlett recover from the beating. She too dies on stage but her exit is not indicated in the stage directions unlike Michael's exit which is noted by Thompson (53). Does that make Scarlett's death more 'real' now? In both scenes the violence and deaths are so unexpected that one is tempted to think they are not real--is this a fantasy? a dream? a nightmare? In this play these questions are difficult to answer.

Rodney's use of Michael's memory brought him relief but this violent ending also brings him closure. After Michael's 'death', Rodney has a monologue in which he recounts Michael's betrayal of him in school. Instead of defending Rodney to his classmates (Rodney was a smart child with a francophone name--two factors which made him a victim or outcast in his school) Michael joined in the taunting. By allowing characters to feel themselves being used, like pictures in a pornographic magazine, Thompson also allows characters to 'kill' these memories. Rodney may not kill Michael, Scarlett may not dance with her lover, but Thompson makes real their thoughts and fantasies so these characters can rid themselves of these pictures in their heads. Memories and fantasies are made into 'pictures', tangible items which can be turned over and caressed but also beaten and killed if necessary. Rodney's sense of victimization can then be relieved because he is able to redefine his relationship with Michael.

The construction of these pictures can be seen as a coping mechanism for the characters in the play. Each one tries to create pictures that will reassure them, will tell them who they are or who they can be. Through the creation of these pictures they will be able to externalize what they may be feeling inside--that feeling of a loss of control or identity. The literal creation of pictures was seen in I Am Yours as Dee painted the portraits of the fetus within her and in this play Joanne also needs to control something growing within her--bone cancer. She tells her friend Rhonda that she does not want to go to the bathroom anymore because, "I sit down to pee I feel my whole life drainin out of me, just draining out with the pee" (34). She can no longer contain herself, she is literally losing herself as her life drains out of her as she rots inside. She then describes to Rhonda

a picture she sees as she walks home, a picture she sees through the frame of her window:

> I'll come home with the groceries? Like after dark?
> and I'll see Frank and the kids through the window,
> in the livin-room, right? Watchin TV, or drawing
> on paper, cuttin out stuff, whatever, and I'll stand
> on the porch and watch em, just...playing...on the
> floor, and I think...that's life, that's life goin
> on without me, it'll be just like that, only I won't
> be here with the groceries, I'll be under the ground
> under the ground with my flesh fallin off a my face
> and I just can't take it. (34)

Joanne creates or imagines two pictures here--one of her children without her and another of herself, rotting under the ground (an image similar to Glidden's internal rotting in White Biting Dog and he too imagines his life as a picture, in his case a Norman Rockwell painting). To maintain some control over the pictures Joanne sees she chooses another picture to embody, a literal picture she has seen hung on her bedroom wall. She describes her poster of a dying Ophelia and decides that this is the way she wants to die, this is a picture she can live with because Ophelia "dies good" (35). Ophelia does not have flesh falling off her face or her life draining out of her; she floats gently down a stream in a beautiful dress and flowers in her hair. To further contain her body and death Joanne tells Rhonda to take pictures of her as this figure to hand out at the funeral, "just, you know, two by four, colour, whatever, it's the one thing that would make it alright--it's the one thing..." (35). Snapshots of an enactment of a poster of a character in a play--Joanne needs frame after frame to keep her life from draining out of her. In order to somehow maintain control over the picture she sees in her mind she chooses a frozen moment to capture who she really wants to be.

Joanne's image of her own death is a wonderful fantasy but Thompson subverts this picture. Like the violent end to many seemingly innocent scenes, Thompson takes this beautiful picture of Ophelia and reverses it. Rhonda describes, in graphic detail, the 'real of it', the realities trying to become this picture would entail: bad smells, flowers choking you, an itchy dress, sewage in the Humber River (36). Rhonda tells Joanne:

> I mean it's all very lovely and that your picture,
> in your room but that's a picture, that's a picture
> you dimwit! The real of it would be awful [...]
> You can't become a picture, do you know what I
> mean? I mean you can't...BE...a picture, okay? (36)

In terms of identity, Thompson reminds us in this scene of the unstable, unfixed nature of the pictures or identities one tries to construct. Joanne cannot BE a picture because a picture is only a moment, fixed and unmoving. For the characters, creating pictures becomes a way of stopping time or going back to another time when life seemed clearer--to control a life or a thought that feels uncontrollable. Sue tries to console herself when her husband tells her of his affair by imagining his cancer returning. She pictures his lover leaving him and herself there to nurse him:

> And he will let me nurse him I will...feed him broth
> with a spoon, like I did my mum, and I will hold his
> sweet head in my chest till till his lips are black
> and his eyes...like bright dead stars and he is dead
> and I will stay I will stay with his body, in the
> hospital room because I did love that body...oh I
> did <u>love--that--body</u> once. (24)

In the scene between Edward and Sherry, Edward forces Sherry to construct a picture for him that will relieve him but at the same time brings him pain. He forces Sherry to tell him that she enjoyed being raped and that it was she who seduced the stranger who raped her.

Thompson indicates the feelings present in this enactment:

> Sherry is saying what she thinks he wants to hear because she is scared, but it is like excrement in her mouth, and Edward is gratified and ripped apart at the same time by what he hears. (59)

'Gratified' and 'ripped apart'--these two feelings seem to be present in many of these pictures. Christine, Rodney, Joanne must all feel both of these emotions in the enactment or description of their own pictures. Again, a sense of internal warfare is present in the opposing feelings of gratification and pain.

Ann Wilson, in "The Culture of Abuse in Under the Skin, This is for you, Anna and Lion in the Streets", feels Thompson offers solutions to victims in her plays, and to members of the audience, by allowing them to reconfigure their status or identities as victims. She writes: "dismantling the culture of abuse may begin with those victims who acknowledge that their victimization, while a constituent aspect of their identities, need not define them".[7] When Isobel is finally able to confront her killer at the end of the play he tries to tell her that she is just "a picture" (63) but having watched the play we know that a picture can be a powerful thing. Isobel confronts her own internal war, she wants to revenge her death and Thompson describes the war within her: "the forces of vengeance and forgiveness warring inside her--forgiveness wins" (63). Isobel gets her life back by telling her murderer that she loves him. She has redefined her 'picture' as victim and gains power over her life again. By making every element of the play questionable, provisional and unstable, the characters are then allowed to question their identities thus allowing

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[7] Wilson, p.169.

them to redefine them. Once the characters are confronted with the picture-like quality of their identities, they can start to play with them, to change the pictures.

Conclusion

Now that I have examined three of Thompson's plays, looked into the worlds Thompson creates and examined the scenes of violence and horror within each of them, I now find myself asking whether the achievement of grace or of any kind of transformation of audience members could occur after they leave the theatre. When I began this thesis I truly believed that Thompson was right: if people see this TRUTH on stage, if they face their inner thoughts and watch them enacted on stage, if nothing is kept hidden, if everything internal is brought OUT--then some kind of transformation or regeneration must take place within an audience member. But does having experienced one of her plays--seeing, witnessing, being penetrated by horror--can that truly bring one to Thompson's definition of grace? As she defines it, grace is obtained by "seeing who you are and changing things". [1] Yes, I believe that not only do audience members watch the plays but they are also implicated and involved in what occurs. People can and do see themselves in her characters. They do 'see who they are' because she connects to some universal or collective truths that we all respond to on some level--but does that lead one to action of any kind? Doesn't watching people commit horrors upon each other just leave one horror-filled? Or simply purged of something awful within us, leaving one empty? Returning again to my initial analogy of slowing down to look at a car wreck at the side of the road--something within all of us seems to be satisfied on some level by seeing this, but

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[1] Rudakoff, Judith. "Judith Thompson Interview" in Fair Play. (Toronto: Simon and Pierre Publishing), p.103.

does it lead us to action in our own lives?

By exploring specifically the endings of all three plays, where one character comes to grace, recognition or transformation, I have tried to locate the ways in which these characters achieve their sudden revelations. One linking factor in all three cases (those being the transformations of Pony, Dee and Isobel) is that they all occur through some form of great physical pain and suffering. In the cases of Pony and Isobel, death was the means of achieving it and for Dee it was the birth (and subsequent loss) of her child which brought about her ability to love. Because of this physicality, the transformations can be acted out. An internal process can thereby be dramatized through a physical act. A suicide, a birth, an ascension to heaven--three radical, physical changes that dramatize these characters' internal transformations quickly but also illustrate the difficulty in achieving true change. The stage directions in two of these moments are very specific but are not, of course, said aloud. Only the readers of her texts know exactly what happens inside of each character when they achieve their grace:

> **Isobel:** (she is about to kill him [Ben] with a stick, the forces of vengeance and forgiveness warring inside her--forgiveness wins) I love you. (63)

> **Dee:** (...She feels purified--through birth--and also through understanding her self-hatred, her guilt about her mother--she is now able to love after having grappled with her 'shadow' or 'animal'. She is infused with this love.) (176)

In order for Thompson to explain why watching (for the audience) or experiencing (for the characters) these horrible scenes was necessary she must offer some hope for all of us

at the end of the play. She must present an achievement of grace on stage for everyone to witness. The change must happen quickly, in front of the audience, for us to see why all the pain and suffering was necessary, that some good has come out of it.

Perhaps this is why some of Thompson's endings may appear somewhat sudden and unsatisfying. Two different reviews of Lion in the Streets express opposing reactions to Isobel's ascension to heaven. For one reviewer the ending "does not unify the disparate elements [of the play] satisfactorily"[2] while another felt the ending "dares us to hope.[...]Here is theatre wholly successful as redemptive art".[3] Cynthia Zimmerman describes the final scenes of Thompson's plays as "unconvincing additions":

> The last scene before the curtain falls, they offer the appeasing thought that radical change is possible and, by so doing, qualify the pervasiveness and tenacity of the cruelty we have just witnessed. In short, they offer a hope we have had no cause to anticipate.[4]

The true 'work' that we must all do within ourselves after we have witnessed or experienced a trauma is slow, internal and difficult. Thompson tries in her plays to stage this work, to physicalize an internal process, often in the final moments of the play. As Zimmerman writes, because of the seeming speed of the characters' revelations these

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[2] Hood, Sarah B. "Lion in the Streets". Rev. of Lion in the Streets. Theatrum 22 (February/March 1991), p.39.

[3] Crowder, Eleanor. "Lion in the Streets" Rev. of Lion in the Streets. Theatrum 22 (February/March 1991), p.38.

[4] Zimmerman, Cynthia. "Judith Thompson" in Playwrighting Women. (Toronto: Simon and Pierre Publishing, 1994), p.204.

scenes do seem to offer a hope that perhaps we should not have been given considering the horrors preceding them. But Thompson, wants to believe that her plays can change people, that she must offer some hope to her audience at the end of her difficult plays. The possibility of change is always offered to us by Thompson. These characters sacrifice themselves to illustrate both the power that comes with self-recognition but also the pain and suffering one may endure to reach this enlightenment.

A clue to understanding what may happen to an audience member after watching one of these achievements of grace comes from the ending of White Biting Dog. This is her only play where there is more than one line of dialogue after another character's final transformation. This is one short scene which illustrates perhaps Thompson's and certainly my own ambivalence regarding the true ability for someone to change after watching one of her plays. Again, it is only through the stage directions that we are told what is happening inside of Lomia and Cape after they learn of Pony's suicide. They both recognize the sacrifices made for them (by both Pony and Glidden) and we watch as they begin to comprehend what has happened:

> (LOMIA looks at CAPE. They both feel, hope,
> that a change is taking place; deep within
> them something has cracked. Maybe the only
> feeling they are experiencing is guilt, but
> that is something)
>
> CAPE: Do you think it will make...any...difference?
>
> LOMIA looks up. Her hope shows in her eyes.
> CAPE just does not know. (108)

Cape asks the question that I ask--will it make any difference, will someone in the

audience truly take what they have seen and try to make a difference in their own lives? Here Thompson seems to recognize that this change may not occur with everyone, or even anyone. Cape just 'does not know' and I believe many audience members leave her plays feeling the same way. Maybe they too only feel guilt or disgust or confusion but I agree with the assertion of the importance that at least they feel something when they walk out of the theatre.

Interestingly, the use of the term 'grace' is used less and less by both Thompson and her critics in more recent articles. In the newest edition of Canadian Theatre Review, an entire issue dedicated to Thompson, there is not a single mention of this concept. Instead, Thompson herself is asking the same questions I ask about the results of allowing the horrors in her plays to seep into you. In an article entitled, "Epilepsy and the Snake: Fear in the Creative Process", Thompson asks questions of herself as an artist that an audience member of her plays could also ask:

> One thing I often wonder about myself, given the demonic characters in so much of my work, is: how can I represent people I abhor?[...]And I wonder, if I give refuge in my soul to monstrous characters and then nurture them inside me, won't they make a monster of me? Isn't even the temporary experience of an evil impulse enough to damage me forever? Or is it perhaps an act of purification: to dig out and face the evil possibilities in oneself may be to cleanse oneself.[5]

The penetrative nature of her work--the characters are inside her, she goes inside of them, she wants them to invade us, go into our subconsciousness--inevitably brings rise to the

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[5] Thompson, Judith. Canadian Theatre Review 89 (Winter 1996), p.7.

fear of allowing these horrors in, a recurring theme in her work. In every play, character fear losing control, fear allowing other people in: everything they do, they do to get out as Lomia says. The fear of things growing within--cancer, babies, something hatching inside--is also a dominant subject in Thompson's work. All of these anxieties are also present in the creation and in the witnessing of her work. She fears a splitting of her insides, of her invasion from within by the evil she writes about. The audience too fears what it sees, not only because of the violent actions or ugly images but that we don't want these images, these people inside of us. Conversely, there is a fear of allowing these images out of us. We do not want our own private thoughts, dreams or fantasies which we thought no one knew about running around on stage in front of us. Thompson, in a panel discussion entitled "Offending your Audience", described how she felt she 'offended' her audiences:

> I was thinking about what being offended means.
> In my case, I hope it is not to be alienated
> and turned away forever but more to be turned
> deeply red. It's the sensation when you're in
> a room with a group of people, and you're think-
> ing something secret or private, and someone
> exposes it, saying 'I know what you're thinking;
> you're thinking this.'[6]

This is not the ugly violence witnessed in action movies which may also offend us but is more easily dismissed. What Thompson presents to us is a deep, personal, internal ugliness that is more difficult to turn away from precisely because it is within us all.

If this thesis is about what an audience member experiences during and after witnessing Thompson's work then I can truly base my conclusions only on what I have

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[6] Thompson, Judith. "Revisions". Theatrum 29 (June/July/ August 1992), p.34.

come to after living with her work. Part of me wonders why she would want to do this to people, why would she want us to have to live with these images "for a long time"?[7] There are images and speeches in Thompson's work that I wish I could forget but they seem stuck somewhere inside of me. I will live with these plays within me for a long time. She makes people feel the plays in their bodies--aside from being intellectually and emotionally engaged in the action. For me, her plays uniquely force the audience to feel something. No one can watch a Judith Thompson play and feel nothing. Even if that feeling is disgust, even if one is offended, hurt or frightened, I agree with Thompson that there are too many people walking around that feel nothing anymore. TV and movies allow us to become numb--we can just change the channel or remind ourselves that this is not real but with Thompson's work, we know these people, their thoughts are inside of each of us. Nothing is hidden. Everything--good or bad, ugly or beautiful--comes out and everyone in the audience sees something from within them enacted on stage. Even if not one audience member behaves differently after leaving the theatre, I believe that everyone is forced to recognize and therefore confront something about themselves that they thought no one ever knew about. That, for me, is where the power of Judith Thompson's work lies.

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[7] Rudakoff, p.93.

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